

THE DIARY PROJECT
DESIGNING FOR POSITIVE BODY PERCEPTION

MASTER'S THESIS FOR MASTER OF ARTS
AALTO UNIVERSITY
SCHOOL OF ARTS, DESIGN AND ARCHITECTURE
DEPARTMENT OF DESIGN
CONTEMPORARY DESIGN

HALA MENASSA - HELSINKI, 2020

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ABSTRACT

Negative body perception is both a personal and social stigma that is felt by many women, regardless of their cultural background. Design can be a tool to help women reflect on their journey with their bodies and start a conversation about this problem.

This thesis is attempting to work on a small aspect of negative body perception by working on the self and integrating women in the process of the project.

This thesis began as a self-reflective approach to body image. It evolved into a participatory project where women utilized self-communication based on a design probe.

The aim of the project is to design a communication tool that enables women to have a positive relationship with their bodies.

Background research provides knowledge on the topic of body perception and how design is contributing to positive body image.

Empirical research begins in the exploration of the topic of body image through a survey and an exhibition project and continues with interviews of ten women from different cultural backgrounds to discuss the pressures they felt connected to their body perception.

Data collection and self-reflection leads to the design of a diary probe that is distributed for the women to fill in. The interpretation and analysis of the diaries, as well as the feedback provided, shows that these women benefited from this exploration of themselves and the project achieved fruitful results.

This diary is a starting point for someone to get to know themselves and focus on growing their body acceptance. It can also be of aid to young people, and those who want to renew their relationship with their bodies or begin a better one. It is a safe and relaxed way to venture down the road of self-discovery and acceptance.

KEYWORDS

Body Perception - Design for Communication - Self-Reflection
- Diary - Design Probe



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thank you to my supervisor Maarit Mäkelä for conducting the course that started it all.

Thank you to my advisor Bilge Aktas for your continual guidance, your invaluable advice and your encouragement to produce a thesis I can be proud of.

Thank you to all the women who participated in this project, our discussions were moving and inspired me to design the diary.

Thank you to Manuel Fonseca Martinez for helping me jump start my thesis, to Ming Unn Andersen for your advice and companionship, to Valentina Lachner for yours and proofreading my thesis.

Finally, thank you to Henry Daly for your unwavering support and multiple counsels throughout this whole process.

This thesis could not have been done without you.

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INTRODUCTION

This thesis focuses on the topic of body perception for women, through a design perspective.

This study starts with my personal experience and motivation, where greater body acceptance was felt through creative exploration and self-reflection.

The aim of the project is to provide the same for other women, with the use of design methods.

The first part of the thesis begins by reviewing the subject of body perception in general and how it is perceived today. It also discusses how design is contributing to the issue of negative body perception.

The second part focuses on the project and the methods used to explore this subject.

The project's main element is the design of a diary probe, a self-communication tool, that women can use to reflect on their body perception.

PERSONAL MOTIVATION

The reason for my interest in the topic of body perception is that I went through significant changes in my body perception when I moved from my home country Lebanon, to Finland.

I noticed an undeniable improvement in the relationship I had with my body and I was curious to know how this change came to be and if it happens to other women as well.

The initial idea for this thesis topic began in Forssa, Finland, in 2017. After taking part in a sauna with fellow students and teachers, the first seed of thought for this whole project arose.

A discussion lead to the realization that taking saunas when young helps in the formation of a healthier body image. It confronts a person at an early age with real bodies, with imperfections and flaws, in a relaxed and almost sacred environment; one without judgments or pressures on how to look or behave. Young girls faced with different body types can articulate a better image of how diverse a women's body can be.

The sauna is a space where a person is completely naked, in every sense of the word, and at peace with themselves. They are at their purest state, surrounded by strangers who are having the same experience. Saunas are engrained in Finnish culture and represent an important ritual that most Finnish people partake in to cleanse the body and mind.

Discussing body perception inside the sauna revealed a stark difference in the viewpoint that the attending Finnish women had of their body perception.

My home country, Lebanon, is permeated with social and cultural pressures about working hard to achieve a body ideal.



Picture of Forssa, Finland 2017

Based on personal exchanges with women from several Arab countries, such as the United Arab Emirates, Iraq, Iran, Jordan, Palestine, Syria, Egypt and Morocco, I realised that a common expectation exists.

This notion of always looking your best and picking apart women who don't, has been instilled in my home country and it took a move to a completely different culture to break this unhealthy mentality.

This is of course an over generalisation of the pressures felt by women as it varies through different social circles. Nevertheless, these women and I have received inappropriate and rude comments regarding our bodies from near-strangers, ones that do not have any sexual connotation. These comments are accepted as this cultural norm of being inquisitive and asking personal questions which is still not observed as being ill-mannered by a lot of people.

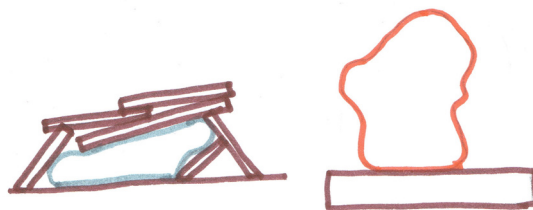
In contrast to this look on body image, the Finnish women who were in the sauna with me were shown early on in their lives that women come in different shapes and sizes, making them more comfortable in their bodies due to the various physiques they see around them.

After this meaningful experience, a reflection arose on how a move to Finland positively affected my body perception. This can be explained by the distance gotten from my culture, and the wider freedom of self-expression provided in a country such as Finland, and in a School of Arts, an environment of acceptance and tolerance.

Overall, my body perception has positively developed due to space away from community pressures, which led me to the desire of finding a way to help other women attain a healthier body image as well.



Sketch of sauna house in Forssa, Finland 2017



Free of pressures

INITIAL EXPLORATION

The process of focusing on body perception began in a class course that I took in 2017 for my master studies.

I experimented with body image through a survey of women from different countries and the resulting creation of an interactive piece that was well received and will be presented later in the methods part.

This experiment was the inspiration needed to continue down the road of exploring body image through design practices.

The insight obtained from having a discussion with an international group of women was that the body perception of individuals differs from one country to another, depending on various factors, such as social and cultural norms.

The discussion also showed that there is a Western-built connotation that a woman's body ideal is thin and slender, for it to be more attractive. But in other societies, women with more fat on their bodies have been perceived as healthier, wealthier and more physically appealing.

For example, there is more discontent in the body perception of women from the U.S than there is in Ghanaian women. Ukrainian women also have greater body issues than the latter (Frederick, Forbes, & Berezovskaya, 2008).

Another study focusing on Sub-Saharan Africa found that in two slums in Nairobi, Kenya, a significant number of participants perceive an obese¹ body type as the ideal standard. This is heavily induced by a community that regards women with excessive weight as healthy and more desirable (Ettarh, Van de Vijver, Oti, & Kyobutungi, 2013).

On the opposite side of the scale, young Swedish women were found to overestimate their body size which suggested a negative body perception and a notion of favouring a thin body ideal (Bergström, Stenlund, & Svedjehäll, 2000).

What these studies have in common is that they focus on women's body dissatisfaction in particular.

Indeed, women are more prone to experiencing body dissatisfaction than men, because of multiple factors, the main one being mainstream media influence, showcasing unrealistic and unattainable body figures, as well as social media platforms, which encourage filtering of real appearances, editing and a pressure to always present your best self.

Although most of the studies were conducted with a focus on women, men's body dissatisfaction has also been studied since the 1980s, when more exposure in media to men's bodies lead researchers to study the effects of this increased coverage (Sklar, 2015).

According to the Australian National Eating Disorders Collaboration (NEDC), body dissatisfaction has been growing exponentially over the last 30 years, and is more present in adolescence for girls, even though the rate is increasing for boys as well (Australian Government Department of Health, n.d.).

After realising that women in different countries experience problems with their body perception in diverse ways I became aware that my personal experience of growth could be relevant for others as well. And since my initial route to this topic originated in a rewarding design class, I decided to elaborate on body perception from a designer's perspective.

¹ Obesity here is a measure of BMI over 30

DESIGN AS A TOOL FOR THINKING

As a designer, how do I make an impact on this subject?

This was the initial question I had after observing the change in my relationship with my body.

In my opinion, being a designer means having a responsibility towards the people you are designing for. In this instance, the responsibility is in generating change in cultural attitudes.

Design as a reflective practice, can highlight concerns in social behaviours by utilizing it as a thinking tool and guiding the conversation towards a better body perception for women.

The goal is to use design as a tool for women to open up communication lines with themselves, regarding their body perception.

The designer possesses the tools necessary to turn an abstract thought into a tangible product. These tools can also facilitate knowing and acknowledging the body as it is.

This subject is important because it affects the majority of women and can take a toll on their lives.

Starting a conversation about this will help women reflect on their journey with their bodies.

Indeed, design here is a tool for thinking.

It is a way to take intangible feelings about body perception and palpably visualize them.

This can be achieved via the method of self-reflection, which reveals the current personal body perception and helps in guiding the path to a better relationship with one's own body.

Looking at my progress towards positive body image, the act of self-reflection helped in determining and recognizing which areas needed work, and a true and honest conversation with my body began. In other words, becoming more empowered about my body emerged from self-reflecting, which is what in turn can be provided to other women.

Self-reflection is a way to deepen the knowledge you have about yourself. It can be used to better understand your acts and thoughts, and to examine what you need to do to become the person you want to be.

In this instance, reflection becomes a tool for women to facilitate their self-communication.

OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

Based on these initial explorations, the thesis project aims at designing a communication tool that enables women to have a positive relationship with their bodies.

The tool opens an introspective conversation about the relationship with their bodies and how they perceive themselves. It also encourages women to be aware of their bodies and become comfortable in it.

Indeed, feeling comfortable in your body is very important because it can shape the way you behave towards yourself, and the level of confidence you have in yourself.

It is a subject that holds a lot of significance because of the pressures that women in my home country and other countries face.

Through constant social and cultural pressure trying to focus all the attention on how my body is perceived, came a hard-earned lesson about myself. I didn't have a healthy and open communication with my body.

These pressures turned out to be completely external, so it was easier to let them go when moving to another country. But for a lot of women, these pressures become internalized and it is therefore very difficult to analyse them and to try to deal with them positively.

In my experience, body empowerment was reached with self-reflection, and a need arose to design this self-communication tool to provide the same for other women.

This thesis began as an explorative approach to tackling a social issue and evolved into a participatory project utilizing self-communication.

This project is attempting to work on a small aspect of negative body perception by integrating the actors in the process of the project and making them a participant as well as a decision-maker of the outcome of the process

Accordingly, the main question of this thesis is:

How can design tools enable a conversation with the self about body perception, in which women find comfort in the experience they have with their own body?

How can filling a diary as a design probe help gain a healthier look at women's body perception?

OUTLINE

The upcoming chapters will feature the different approaches used to answer the research questions.

Beginning with background research, I reviewed what body perception is in general, and how it is perceived today. Then came the discussion on how various design practices have been contributing to this social issue, both to embrace and overcome negative body perception.

After considering the current situation, I presented the Diary Project and the methods that were employed to create the journal and work with women.

These methods include quantitative, qualitative and designerly approaches to the topic.

The project began with collecting data from one question about the body asked to a hundred and fifty women and continued with an interactive exhibition piece that served as an inspiration for the development of the thesis.

In the next step, I conducted in-depth interviews with 10 women from different cultural backgrounds about what issues they have with their own body perception.

Afterwards, data was collected from the interviews and analysed. This analysis revealed the problems that women tackle the most, and accordingly, I generated different tasks and questions based on these insights.

I then designed a diary tailored to these women and distributed it to them.

After the participants spent three weeks with their diaries, I collected them and asked for their feedback. The diaries and the contributors' comments enabled me to examine the role of design for self-communication.

After discussing the findings of this project, I tackled the meanings and implications of the diary results, as well as its possible improvements and future studies.

BACKGROUND RESEARCH

STUDYING BODY PERCEPTION

Body perception, or more commonly referred to as body image, was first studied in patients who suffered from brain injuries (Burrows, 1967).

It was regarded as only a construction of someone's understanding of their world through their involvement alone. It was then analysed in the fields of psychology and sociology, where its meaning grew wider.

Paul Schilder (1970), a psychoanalyst and neurologist, was one of the first people to widen its meaning. He studied body image as a fluctuating construct in direct correlation with one's exchanges with other people. It was understood as the image that a person had of themselves in their mind.

For this thesis, body image is regarded as the perception someone has of their physical appearance and the thoughts that come from it. These thoughts can be internally induced and/or influenced by external pressures.

A person can have a more positive or negative relationship with their body, based on previous experiences and everyday social life.

Since the trigger of this thesis was a transition from negative to positive perception, I will start by discussing what negative body perception is and move to positive body perception and how it can progress.

Negative body perception, or body dissatisfaction, often develops when a person has a habit of worrying about how their body looks and how much they weigh (Verplanken & Tangelder, 2011).

In this thesis, it is also perceived as an inconsistency with how a person observes their body and how they want it to be -i.e. their ideal body.

When this person cannot reconcile these two perceptions, they form self-esteem issues and have a negative or difficult relationship with their body.

But how do people develop negative body perception?

It is often acquired by developing internal pressures and by absorbing external pressures.

For instance, in a study about issues linked to body dissatisfaction in Lebanese people, it was determined that community pressures and media communications have a substantially harmful impact on body image, especially for women. Family pressures, seen here as conveying negative messages about the body weight and appearance, were a key factor in body dissatisfaction (Haddad, et al., 2019, pp. 512-514).

Body dissatisfaction has been previously studied in relation to body sizes, dieting regimens and cosmetic surgery. Many methods have been proven to assess if a person has a negative body perception, and research into positive body perception has also been gaining momentum.

It has been studied through various disciplines, including psychology and feminist discourse, and has numerous facets to it such as body acceptance and inner positivity.

For an extensive review of those diverse aspects, see (Tylka & Wood-Barcalow, 2015)

Positive body perception is a complex notion that encompasses many internal and external factors in someone's life and does not mean that a person is pleased with all the facets of themselves, rather they have less difficulties with how they perceive their body and are less influenced by others (community and media) to develop body image issues.

They are able to maintain a good relationship with their bodies. (Tylka & Wood-Barcalow, 2015)

It is important for a person to have a more positive outlook of their body, as it reduces the amount of pressure, cultural or otherwise, associated with their body perception and leads to a healthier attitude towards their body, and that of others. It can be liberating to let go of external pressures and begin focusing on other aspects of a person's life.



Internal and external pressures

TOWARDS A POSITIVE BODY IMAGE

Regardless of which country a person grew up in or which circumstances they lived through; one factor remains constant. There is a recurrent message being conveyed through a person's life that there is an ideal figure to aim for within their society.

Beauty standards are in continual variation throughout the years, but the pressures of being associated with that standard are invariable. And design is contributing to this change of standards, mostly through fashion.

Following a discussion with Cynthia Traboulsi (2016), a certified fashion specialist focusing on fashion image, you need only go back 40 years to witness dramatic changes in fashion for women.

If you begin your focus on the late 1980s, you see a big emphasis on woman power, showcased in fashion by ample and puffy shirts, pointy shoulders and big pants, which illustrates a big silhouette highlighting strength and a more dominant figure. This is complemented by the rise of 'super-models', who have stronger and more athletic bodies than the ones that came before them.

Just 10 years later, the 1990s standard changes to a much thinner and leaner body, with tight clothes, short tops and flat stomachs.

Forward another 10 to 20 years and the 2000s to 2010s are highlighted by a rise in the diversity of body types due to a surge in media communication. Nostalgia and a mix of different older fashion trends are present, and the body ideal is taking on a more rounded and curvy form (Traboulsi, 2016)



1- A model wears an Emporio Armani power suit at a Paris fashion show in 1989 - Ted Blackbrow/Associated Newspapers/REX USA



2- Shalom Harlow in Gianni Versace ad 1997
Steven Meisel for VogueSpirit



3- Candice Huffine and Michelle Olson for V magazine 2010
Solve Sundsbo

Fortunately, we live in an age where there is more and more cultural recognition and tolerance of varied body figures, with famous people championing diversity in body shapes and sizes, and increased exposure to the de-stigmatization of overweight people.



4- Lizzo, TIME's entertainer of the year, 2019 - Paola Kudaki for Time

Unfortunately, companies are profiting from this acceptance of new body types by leading clever campaigns showing that there is a problem with body dissatisfaction, but without attempting to provide a solution or saying who is to blame for this matter. Such companies realized that by merely pointing out that there is a problem, they would get credit for it and make more money off of women buying their products.

Even worse, it seems like they are blaming the women who have body dissatisfaction for feeling this way, and passively-aggressively showing them that they should love their bodies.

As previously discussed, there has usually been a struggle with people to obtain a certain body ideal. The possible reasons for this are that some organisations are benefiting from this issue, such as pharmaceutical and weight-loss companies, as well as political parties with agendas on how overweight people are driving health care cost up (Campos, Saguy, Ernsberger, Oliver, & Gaesser, 2006).

Cosmetic and fashion companies, as well as social media accounts also contribute to such discourse through advocating one type of body.

All of these external pressures are bound to be consumed by people and internalized, thus encouraging these negative body perceptions while pressuring for fitting into the healthy and perfect body ideal. Ultimately, these initiatives present an ideal person that is always in control of their body, of their food intake, their exercise routine and how they look.

There also lies a deeper problem with for-profit companies getting involved in a social and cultural issue.

Take for example the Dove initiative: Campaign for Real Beauty (CFRB) and its corporate brand identity. It is a marketing campaign to promote confidence in women of different body types.

It is spreading and maintaining a dangerous principle of associating itself with a postfeminist discussion to advance the profit of the corporation. It is creating its own notion of 'real beauty' and taking on a role in the discussion of female beauty in a culture of consumption (Murray, 2013).

Body acceptance began as a radical and rebellious movement against discrimination based on sex, and against capitalism. It combatted cosmetic companies and diet industries but turned into an aesthetic issue that could be solved by those same companies which rebranded themselves to sell you a new message of beauty in diversity and body satisfaction.

This has been happening for example with the deviation of the body positivity movement on Instagram, where campaigners for this cause shifted into replicating capitalist principles and accepting changes to their body perceptions (Cwynar-Horta, 2016).

Another setback of companies trying to align themselves with 'body positivity', is that they sometimes fall short with their consumers through their marketing strategies:

The clothing company Everlane, made a campaign featuring a plus-size model wearing the brand's underwear, but did not produce that size of underwear, which created a backlash from consumers (Lauren, 2018).

Many cosmetic companies, such as Tarte, It Cosmetics, and Beautyblender have also faced criticism for their limited range in foundation shades, which didn't cover darker skin tones. YSL (Yves Saint Laurent) was one of these companies, and after introducing its All Hours Foundation of 22 different shades, consumers noticed that 19 of those were for lighter skin tones. YSL responded by increasing its line to 25 products (Moné, 2018).

Thus, producing garments and products for one type of body silently promotes a certain body type as the accepted one, while generating body dissatisfaction for people who are not similar (Fetto, 2019).

Although some corporations used body positivity or inclusiveness in their campaigns as mere advertisement strategies, there were also well-received examples that managed to start a discussion and raised awareness on the issues. The Aerie Real campaign, an initiative of the Aerie clothing brand, stopped digitally airbrushing their models and diversified them to observe its positive effect on women (Rodgers, Kruger, Lowy, Long, & Richard, 2019).

The participants involved reported positive feedback from the campaign and were able to relate to the garments more easily than the usual images of unattainable beauty.

This shows that if more initiatives like this were to happen, negative body pressures from media platforms and unrealistic beauty standards could decrease.

While developing such attributes, can design contribute to this social issue?



5- Everlane campaign of plus-size model, 2018



6- Yves Saint Laurent All Hours Foundation, 2017



7- Danielle Candray, advocate for those with alopecia Posing for AerieReal campaign, 2018

DESIGN FOR POSITIVE BODY PERCEPTION

The topic of body perception in women can be tackled from different fields, such as sociology, psychology, and health science.

As a designer, my approach is giving form to a project through self-reflection for personal growth rather than examining what causes the negative body perception.

The designer here is an enabler, more than a maker.

Indeed, design is not limited to producing functional objects anymore, but its definition has been shifting to a way that facilitates social change.

There have been theoretical and practical approaches in design to tackle societal problems going beyond only being a production-oriented practice.

As discussed by design researcher Ezio Manzini (2013, pp. 57-66) social innovation can be driven by design initiatives, that promote different creative practices. Designers can be seen as facilitators or triggers of new conversations.

Similarly, in this thesis, design is used as a tool to examine a social issue and to ask more questions.

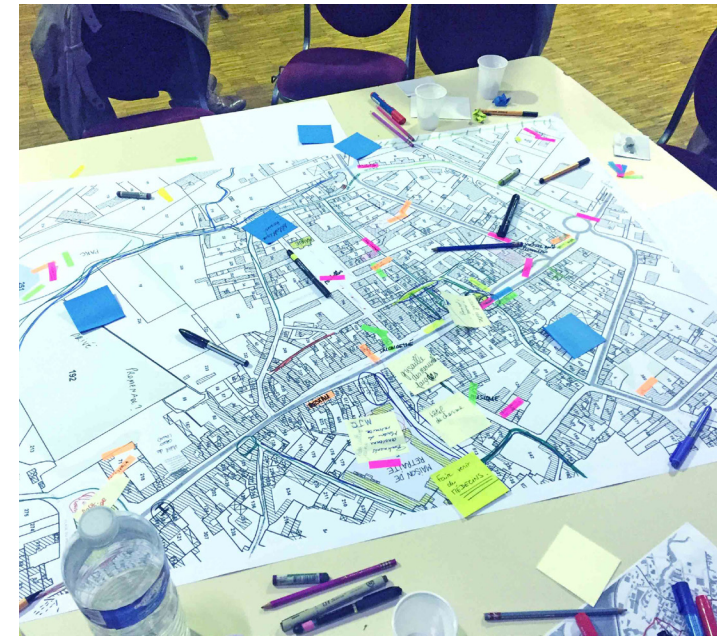
The designer becomes a facilitator of self-awareness.

There are varied departments where design for behavioural change can be applied such as sustainability, health and wellbeing, safety, design against crime and social design. For an extensive review of these themes with applied case studies, see Proquest, Niedderer, Clune, and Ludden (2018, pp. 159-261).

Also, when these projects bring designers and users together, they can become more impactful and carry a meaning and weight to the people benefiting from it. The designer can act as a teacher and a facilitator between different stakeholders that are involved in the project (Vanni, 2019, pp. 29-95).

This notion of design as an approach to forward social impact was implemented in a class project that I participated in, aiming at revitalizing the identity of a small town in Orbec, France.

By co-designing with the inhabitants of Orbec, the class was able to present solutions that could be rapidly implemented with little to no cost for the municipality, while creating an Orbec identity that was generated with the citizens of the town, and to their benefit (Ville d'Orbec, 2016).



8- Orbec workshp, 2016, Fance

Participating in this project impacted my idea of design and allowed the visualization of the role of a designer as more than a maker. It aided in finding new approaches to the topic at hand, women's body perception.

Woman representation and women's bodies in general have been studied previously within design, in the fields of advertising campaigns, fashion, and different design processes. Designers have conceived their own approach to the topic of body perception.

The following are three different design fields tackling the same subject in their own way: Graphic Design, Jewellery Design and Fashion Design.

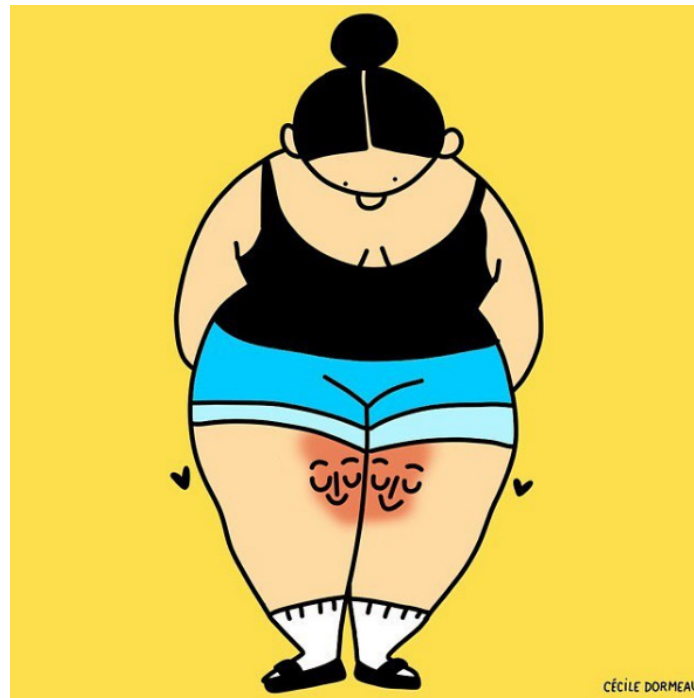
Cécile Dormeau is a French illustrator who challenges the conventional body image tropes by showing women just as they are.

She draws empowered and funny characters of women in everyday life that are usually private or not talked about. This is to start a conversation on normalising these aspects of womanhood.

She aims to represent the diversity of figures, and to encourage women to be proud and comfortable in their bodies (Dormeau, 2020).

Indeed, taking a fun and light approach on the issue of body image is a good way for people to start a conversation on the topic, something this project is attempting to emulate.

Dormeau uses an activist and critical design approach to create a positive impact through her work and demonstrates how illustrations depicting strong body accepting women can have an impact on her community and its views on body perception.



In her thesis, Burcu mentions the legends of individuals who were captivated by their beauty and met a terrible end, such as Narcissus or Dorian Grey. She argues that these stories, while fabricated, present a truth about human fallibility: Humans are creatures of desire who are under the impression that their aspirations can be achieved no matter what.

These motivations can reinforce humans to pursue their desires or can act as a limitation.

She also talks about how people are not alone in this search but are being influenced and directed to certain attractions by marketing campaigns, which she believes confine people into prearranged domains of identities.

The designer tackles this issue by creating objects that go against the codes enforced by marketing campaigns and the media in general.

Through these thoughts, Burcu creates objects that generate reflections about what drives people and how far they are willing to go to accomplish their wishes.

She focuses on the desire of achieving a beauty standard, which has been attained by some people through cosmetic surgery. The author also talks about owned objects as a good way to assess people's motivations, and who they are aiming to become. An example of that is jewelry, which is an indicator of people's wealth and their status in society. It is also used to beautify a person.

Burcu tackles the role of jewellery in society and associates it with body image. She designs fine pieces of jewelry, called *Terrifying Beauty*, that are worn on the face of a person and deform their appearance.

This effectively challenges the notions that people have about the role of jewelry. She wants the viewer to question the function of her pieces and sense a pressure between the face and the product, and the relationship they have with each other.

Burcu beautifully tackles the subject of body image by marrying cosmetic surgery, like rhinoplasty, and jewellery, as tools for achieving a beauty standard.

She then creates a piece that lifts the nose, defying both the function of a jewellery item and the role of plastic surgery in beautifying a person's face (Büyüknal, 2009).



The designer here is taking a provocative and critical look at an object and challenging our preconceived assumptions of it and the role it plays in our everyday life.



10- Büyüknal, *Terrifying Beauty*, 2009

Similar to the motivations for this thesis, Karoline Vitto began her project from a personal point of view, regarding her body image.

She grew up in Brazil, a country with similar cultural pressures to Lebanon, with unattainable standards of beauty where many women resort to cosmetic surgery and diets.

She then moved to the UK and began to have an appreciation for her body and to explore this relationship. She felt that there was less pressure surrounding body image in the UK than Brazil, similar to moving from Lebanon to Finland.

To address this new connection with her body, Karoline began experimenting with garments designed to change the silhouette, which lead her to write a thesis about the female body in social media, and to design a clothing collection addressing female body issues for her master's degree in fashion.

Through a personal and creative start to her project, Karoline was able to use fashion design as a tool to examine and tackle a social issue and stimulate a conversation about body dissatisfaction in women.

In her thesis, Karoline discusses female body image in Brazil and her experience with continual harassment on the streets. She also talks about how female representation in social media, while highly edited, can be seen as both empowering and objectifying.

On one hand, female selfies¹ are seen as a tool to take charge of the body and endorse uplifting messages directed towards people who can identify to a person.

On the other hand, a lot of them strengthen the notions of a male-dominated beauty standard and emphasize consumerist behaviours (Gomes, 2018).

In addition, Karoline argues that some influencers and lifestyle trainers championing body positivity are focusing on confidence as the ultimate beauty, which puts a burden on people who are insecure about their bodies and are now defined as unattractive because they are not comfortable in their bodies.

Karoline's thesis demonstrates that women need representation in all its forms, and that the fact that some of them conform to a patriarchal view of beauty is natural because this is the world that most of them live in.

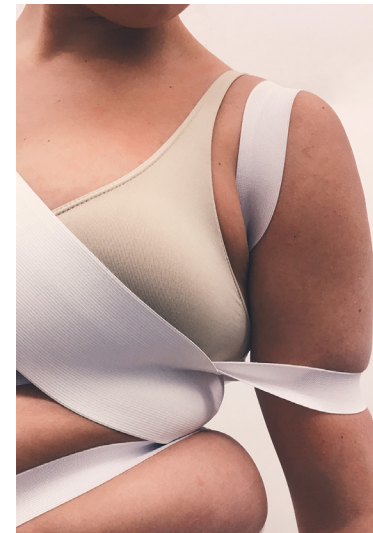
After writing her thesis, Karoline designed clothes that highlighted body parts that most women want to hide, in order to expose the aesthetic pressures that women have to deal with, and to promote body acceptance in her own personal way.

This resonates with this project, as the approach was also personal and the outcome was not a solution for all, because body acceptance is an intimate process, but what is being proposed in this thesis, much like Karoline's, is a gentler way of perceiving the self.

¹ Selfies are defined here as photos directed by account members and not necessarily taken by them



11 - The body as Material SS20 2019



METHODS, DATA AND ANALYSIS

Emerging from personal experience, I studied developing an understanding of positive body perception with various tools. In this chapter, I will discuss the development of the Diary Project in a chronological order.

This thesis is inspired by a human-centered design approach which is a method of finding solutions by focusing on the human viewpoint throughout the development process. It typically entails three phases: Inspiration, Ideation and Implementation (IDEO, 2015).

The first phase consists of going deep into the lives of the people you are designing for and learning straight from them: This project lead to interviewing women and asking them personal questions to learn about their lives and the pressures they had to deal with, concerning their body perception.

The Ideation Phase entails analysing the results of what you have learned from the previous phase and beginning to design the 'solution': This led to the analysis of the interviews and the development of tasks and questions tailored for the women to answer, in the form of a diary.

The last phase is about implementing the solution to the people who have been at the centre of your procedure: The diaries were given to the women to fill up, as a helping tool for them to start or continue a positive relationship with their bodies.

This approach to design has been explored in a similar manner by design researchers Noronha and Wilde (2018, pp. 198-217).

They used experimental design methods to engage with their users and utilized cultural probes in the form of a kit with a diary and a garment that the wearer needs to interact with for a certain period and then reflect on by writing and drawing in the diary.

By putting the wearer at the heart of their experiment, they were able to attain rich data from people's relationships with their garments and further develop their analysis (Noronha & Wilde, 2018).

Similarly, in this thesis, by positioning the actors at the centre of the project, I was able to extract data of high quality because the emphasis was centered around the women's feelings and personal experiences.

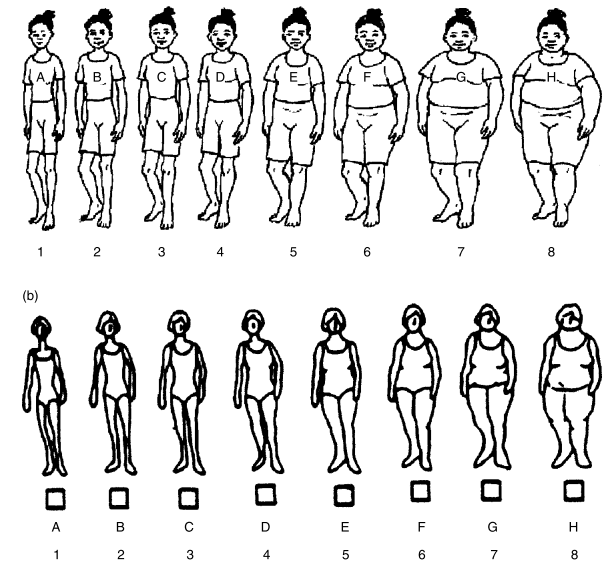
Previously, several methods studied negative body perception among women; among these, the most used is the quantitative research method, the silhouette studies (Mchiza, et al., 2005).

Women are presented with body shapes of different sizes and are asked to choose the silhouette that best represents their body size (Okop, Levitt, & Puoane, 2019) and (Titilola, et al., 2016).

The results are not representative of how their bodies are in real life, and many participants were dissatisfied with their body size.

Other methods used are questionnaire studies, where people are asked to report on their body satisfaction, as well as interviews.

There also exist behavioural methods to determine body dissatisfaction, such as dieting regimens, having cosmetic surgery and exercising routines (Grogan, 1999).



12- The silhouette studies, 2005

In order to tackle the subject of body image for women in a more fun and light-hearted way, there was the need to know if that subject could be enjoyable for the participants involved rather than intimidating.

This way, the participants of the project could challenge themselves without having a mental pressure.

Therefore, during this project, I have employed various types of methods that combined hands-on interaction tools and discussions that are facilitated through interviews.

When creative methods are used as part of research, the process often evolves constitutively, in which each step informs the next one.

This is typical of this type of research, because reflections emerging from the process contribute to the evolution of the project and its outcome, which is unknown and evolves with each new method (Aktas, 2019).

In this thesis, the process began with a reflection on the body in a course assignment and evolved into a thesis project intending to design a tool to help women in understanding their body perception in a healthier way. I will discuss the process of the thesis in three steps.

Step 1 explores creatively studying body perception, Step 2 collects information about various negative experiences of women from different backgrounds, and Step 3 develops a tool for self-communication towards a better relationship with the body.

STEP 1: WHAT IS THE FAVOURITE PART OF YOUR BODY?

As mentioned in the Initial Exploration part, a survey was initially conducted as the project of Design Exploration and Experimentation course in 2017.

The survey reached over 150 women, to understand if the topic of body perception could be tackled in a positive way.

Only one question was asked:

What is the favourite part of your own body?

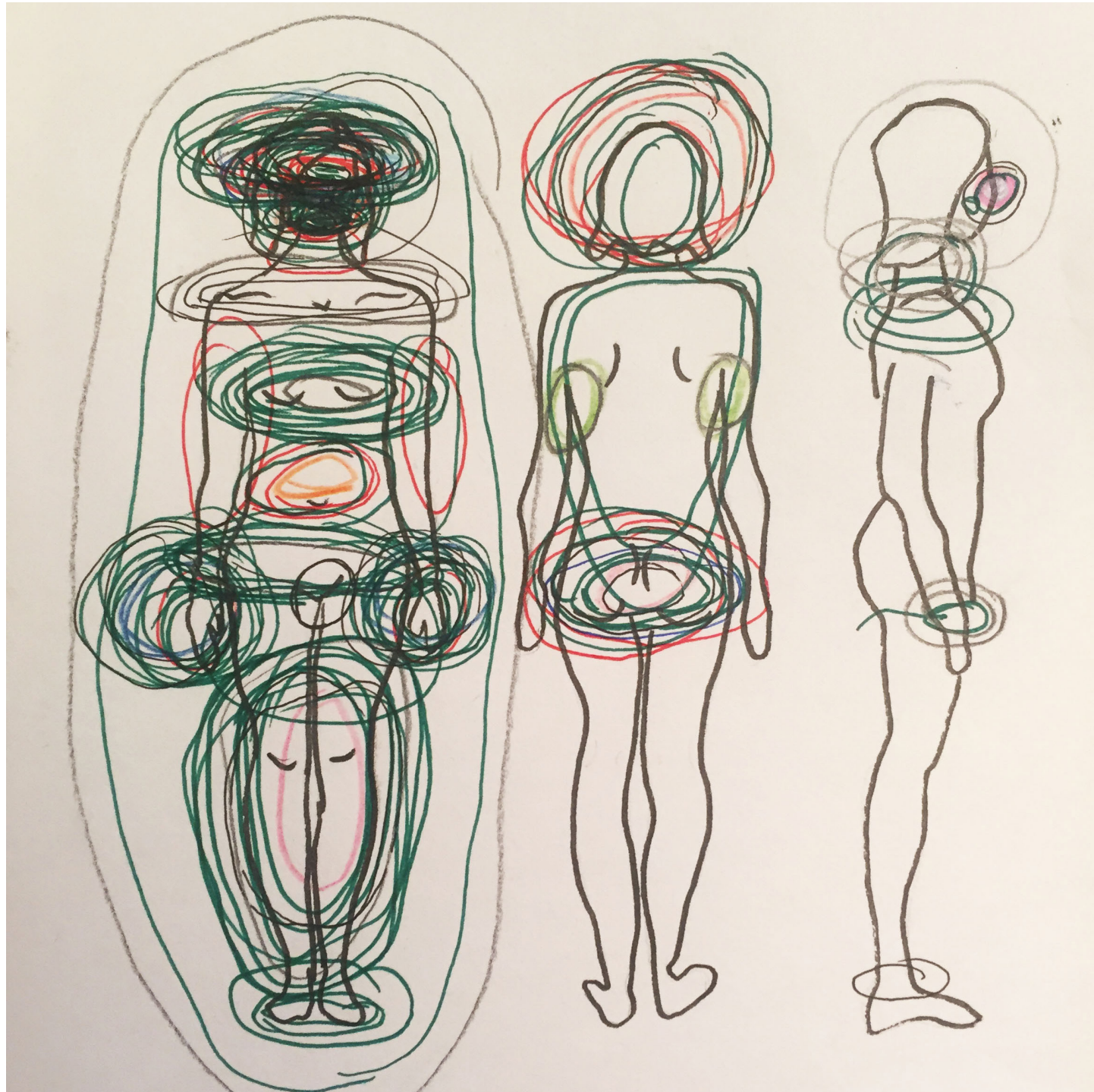
The question was asked to people both in person and in the form of texts. The answers were given enthusiastically and varied a lot. They covered every part of a women's body.

Most of the women also said that they had never thought about their favourite part but could name several parts they didn't like.

Some women felt shamed by companies and society into thinking that they are not enough, that they need to improve a certain part of their body, that they can do better.

This feeling of judgment and fault seeking is what drove the need to design something optimistic, and the overwhelmingly positive comments received from the survey allowed the focus of the project to be solely on making women feel better about their body.

Survey analysis



After this survey came the design and exhibition of a full-body plaster model of myself, exposed all in white at the opening exhibition of the course Design Exploration and Experimentation.

The exhibition visitors were asked to paint their favourite body parts with a colour of their choice. After 2 weeks, the model was fully covered in paint, proving that this project struck a chord with people.

This was an initial hands-on approach to the subject of body image, and it was incredibly rewarding to see this project unfold and witness a positive outcome created by other people.

The release of negative pressures I went through encouraged me to further articulate the topic of positive body perception with design tools.

The focus of the thesis then went into a deeper dive into the body image pressures that women face in their everyday lives. To learn more about these pressures, and if they are across cultural and social boundaries, interviews were organized with women from different backgrounds.



People painting on model during exhibition in Arabia, Finland



Final result of model

STEP 2: INTERVIEWS

Qualitative research interviews were conducted, by meeting with 10 different women face to face, using a semi-structured type of dialogue (Adams, 2015, pp. 492-505).

A general series of questions were formulated that were flexible and could be adapted to each person, depending on their response.

Before the actual interviews, a pilot was made with one person to assess if the questions were valid and if there was enough space for personal exchange.

The interviews became a way to get a better understanding of the pressures that women can experience throughout their lives.

The interviews were conducted in different locations, my home, their homes, coffee shops and pre-reserved rooms at the Aalto University campus. Most of the interviews took place in Finland with the exception of the last two, completed in Lebanon.

The setting was to be as private as possible for the interviewees to feel relaxed and at ease. The sensitive and personal information that these participants were providing would not be suitable for crowded spaces.

The women interviewed were chosen randomly, some of them were referred by friends, others were found on social media. Most of these women live or have lived in Finland but have grown up in different countries.

This was important to establish if these women faced various cultural and societal pressures in a different environment, and how that affected their body perception.

The interviews were mainly conducted in English. French and Arabic were also used when the interviewees wanted to express something in a specific context. All the women were fluent in English, so there was no misinterpretation of information.

A variety of cultural backgrounds in the women would potentially show if the pressures in body perception were felt in different experiences and upbringings.

The age of the women varied between 24 and 45 years old at the time of the interviews.

Their occupations varied greatly: arts and crafts background, designers from different fields, business management, anthropology, fashion and garments, education, cultural encounters, urban planning, publishing manager, gaming, and DJ.

They were reached via email, and then met individually for interviews that lasted between one and three hours.

PROCESS AND QUESTIONS

All the interviews began in the same way: Some information was given about the thesis project, then there was a brief talk about my experience with my body perception.

There is a need to stress that each person was very distinct in the way they answered the questions, and not all of them were asked to all of the women.

The general outline of what they talked about was preserved, but the way the questions were phrased and how they got to their answers differed from one person to the next.

In fact, for some of the women, two or three questions were all that was necessary for them to go deep into their lives, for others, more inquisitive questions had to be asked (A more detailed version of the interview questions can be found in Appendix A).

The first questions asked were very general, they were about their age, occupation and family situation.

To break the ice, light questions about their everyday life were asked such as inquiring about their morning routine.

Then we talked about their past and focused on any societal pressures they might have felt. We also discussed cultural pressures, what they might have endured, from magazines growing up, to ads on TV, and social media.

After going a bit deeper into their lives, stepping back was suitable to enquire about their country and the general population's view on plastic surgery, and beauty standards.

The last portion of questioning was the deepest one; here they discussed their relationship with their bodies and any negative feedback and critiques they had received throughout their lives, how they reacted to them, and how it made them feel.

They also talked about the consequences of moving to a different country, and if that changed their body perception and how.

All of these questions mounted up to two meaningful ones:

How comfortable are you in your own body?

How much has social and cultural pressures shaped the way you feel about your own body?

STUDYING THE INTERVIEWS

SUMMARY OF EACH WOMAN

Before discussing the key findings, I will summarize each interview because these women discussed personal issues and deserve to be represented in this project.

They are direct participants and collaborators in achieving a desirable result to the project.

Because of the consent forms that these women signed, they will be referred to by numbers.

Woman #1

Age 30, grew up in Finland and lived almost her whole life here, lives with her husband. She has had a very positive upbringing and has not faced any big hardships in society concerning her body image.

She had some struggles in her teenage years, concerning her appearance and has adapted to them with grace to avoid any more discomforts, and learned from them.

She has a good support system around her which helped her not harbour any feelings of contempt, or disappointment against her community, parents, or friends.

She has had a very safe environment where she could grow up and become the woman she is today without experiencing any big issue or anyone standing against her.

Woman #2

Age 26, Palestinian-Lebanese, grew up in Lebanon, moved to India and now resides in Finland with her husband and child. She is a very open person with a sense of vulnerability which she is willing to share.

She had to endure a lot of social pressure from her family and friends and she still harbours feelings of insecurity and awkward self-awareness. She does not feel like she can go back to her home country as the judgement and criticism of other people have taken a very big toll on her.

Woman #3

Age 26, Chinese, moved to Norway then Finland, has been in Europe for over 3 years. She has dealt with some cultural pressures but has a positive mindset about her body.

She dealt with weight issues a little bit but has had a very supportive family. She has felt a difference with her body perception since she moved to Europe, mainly because she attracted a lot more attention, as she looks different from the majority.

She has also adapted to change when people have pointed out things about her personality as a woman. Overall, she believes she has a healthy outlook on her body.

Woman #4

Age 28, Finnish-Palestinian, grew up in Finland but has lived in Jordan as well. Lives with her wife. She has struggled with her body perception in her recent past, as she has had to face an eating disorder that was part of her life.

As a good summary of her interview, here is a direct quote from her: "Finland is good for you when you have a good relationship with yourself because you have the space; but if you don't have a good relationship with yourself and you have all this space, it's really scary, what do you do with it? A good community around you helps with your inner struggles, and a meaningful person in your life who supports you is a big help. The right people make the place right for you."

Woman #5

Age 45, Finnish, grew up and lives in Finland with her husband and child. She has a very good relationship with her body and believes that it has only become better with age.

She does not care about how her body looks anymore but is happily surprised by how strong and functional it is.

She believes the body of a woman is a marvel, as it can produce life and restore itself beautifully.

She has had a healthy body perception throughout her life and is now instilling these positive notions of body image into her daughter.

Woman #6

Age in her 30s, brought up in Pakistan, then moved to the north of Europe and now lives in Finland.

She had an internal struggle with her weight and was trying to find a good balance for herself. She was made aware at a young age, with a negative comment, about her difference in body shape compared to the girls around her.

This made her view herself in a different light and brought on years of struggle with her weight. She does have a healthier body perception now and is well adjusted to living in a different country and culture.

Woman #7

Age 29, born in Finland but has lived in several East Asian countries before returning to Finland. She has had a very supportive and caring family, who made sure she didn't go into extreme dieting when younger. She also had no thoughts of beauty standards and negative body image when growing up in Asia, as her peers were focused on studies.

She believes she has a healthy relationship with her body and says: "you have to give yourself permission to be okay with who you are".

She has had to overcome a significant change in her appearance when she was diagnosed with alopecia. She felt like her womanhood was taken away from her and resembled an alien. There was a disassociation with her body for a while, because of this substantial transformation.

After reaching out to other people and posting a picture of herself on social media, she began the process of healing and now has a very positive outlook on her body image as well as a renewed view on the internal beauty of other people.

Woman #8

Age 24 grew up in China and has been living in Finland for a couple of years. She did not have a negative body image growing up, as she was more focused on her studies.

She believes that wearing makeup or looking presentable is a sign of respect for the people you are going to meet.

She has found it hard to adjust to Finnish culture and was not comfortable in her body in the first few months but has now adapted to her new lifestyle by getting to know herself and listening to her body.

She suffers from anxiety but is beginning to feel more comfortable in her body. She misses a sense of community that she feels she has lost in Finland.

Woman #9

Age in her 30s. She grew up in Lebanon but has lived in European countries and now resides in her home country.

She comes across as a very strong individual who is firmly against criticism and judgment.

She has a solid personality and a tough demeanour. However, she is very open to the hardships that she had to overcome, is still struggling with and she admits to not always dealing with her problems in the most constructive way.

She had a childhood active with judgment from her peers and, in some instances, she resorted to violence as a way to cope and silence her bullies as she does not shy away from conflict. Her physique and attitude are non-conformist and so in a country like Lebanon, she has had to fight her way to a peaceful and comfortable life.

Woman #10

Age 28, Armenian-Lebanese, grew up in Lebanon, lived in Finland and now resides in the U.S. She has been dealing with negative comments about her body since her teenage years.

She has had to deal with these pressures from family members and friends, as well as acquaintances and strangers.

After being more open towards herself, positively exploring her body perception, and taking ownership of her body in Finland, she came back to Lebanon only to feel alienated and to lose her sense of self.

She talked about the pressure of always presenting your best self in Lebanon and how it takes a toll on your inner self and turns the environment toxic. There is also this constant criticism and judgement from people you barely know, which is hurtful and can leave scars.

For someone who is lacking in self-esteem, she makes up for it by speaking at conferences in front of hundreds of people.

INSIGHTS

After each interview, a summary was made of each woman accompanied with my self-reflections.

This process led to interesting findings, such as a feeling of hopefulness for my future and older self and a positive take on my body perception.

Most of the women were open and ready to tell their stories, and some of them said that they were happy and eager for someone to listen to them and the struggles they have had to overcome.

Many positive emotions came out of these interviews, such as a feeling of gratefulness on my part and of genuine admiration and surprise of the level of trust these women granted me.

Unfortunately, the interviews also caused a great deal of sadness and hopelessness that took a toll on everyday life. Self-reflecting also revealed how strangers can connect on a deep level and form an affinity based on their shared struggles. It demonstrated that a profound and meaningful discussion can form an intangible bond between strangers.

Most importantly, self-reflection exposed the major problems that these women talked about, mainly how negative communication can affect people's self-perception and how pressures exist in many forms and different cultures.

To better analyse these theories, a detailed report was written of every issue touched upon during the interviews.

ANALYSIS

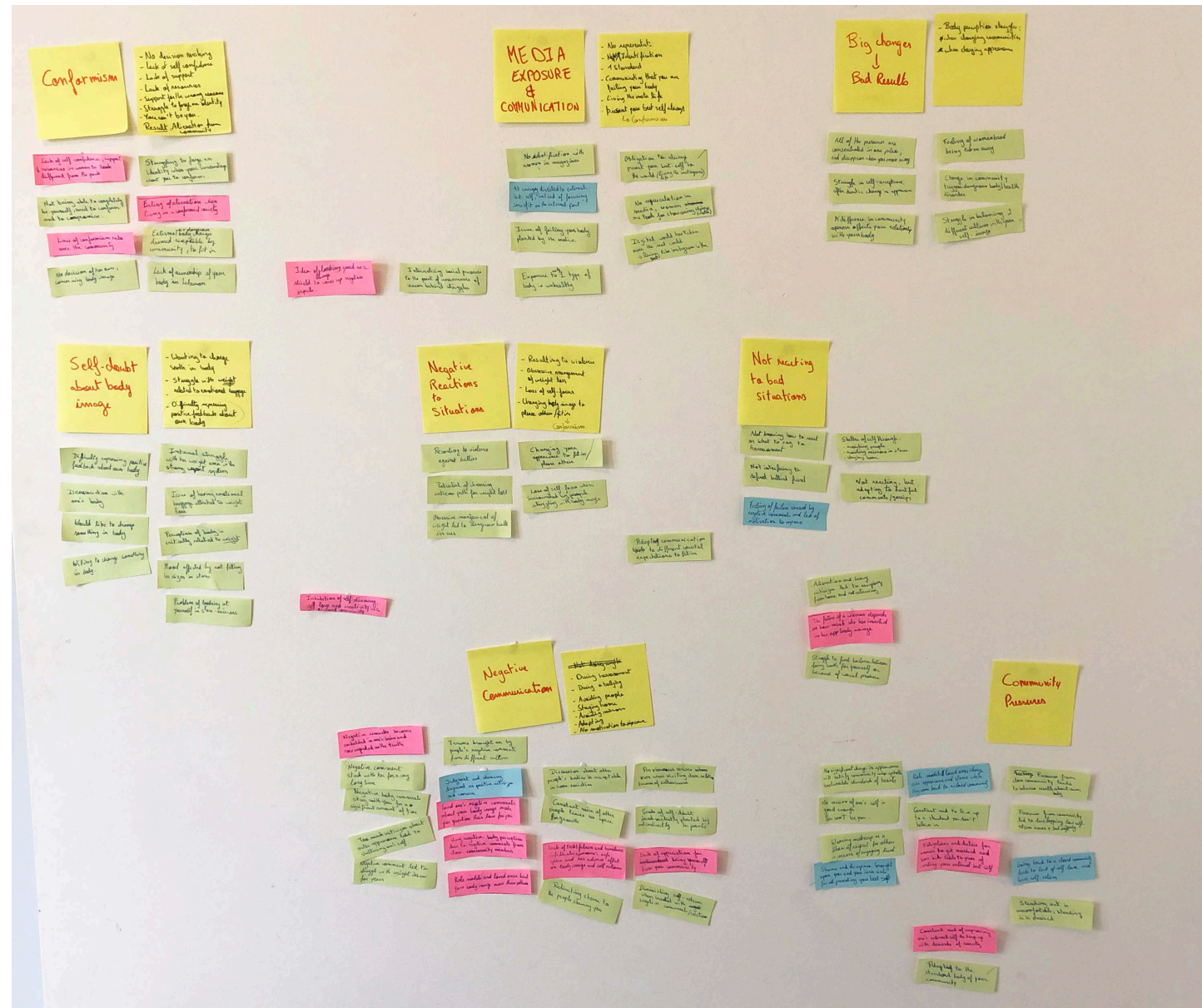
The analysis of the interviews to extract general themes was made using the *cut and sort* technique, discussed in detail by Ryan and Bernard (2003, pp. 94-96).

It began by listening again to each interview and transcribing the important parts. Every issue discussed by the women was written down and then sorted into different categories based on their similarities.

The more times an issue was discussed, the bigger its cluster became. In the end, nine clusters were generated, namely:

- 1- Conformism
- 2- Media Exposure and Media Communication
- 3- Self-doubt about body image
- 4- Negative reactions to situations
- 5- Not reacting to bad situations
- 6- Big changes, bad results
- 7- Negative communication
- 8- Community pressures
- 9- Extras

The report below shows the different types of problems, without the number of times they were discussed.



Analysis work

1- Conformism

- o No decision making
- o Lack of self-confidence
- o Lack of support and resources
- o Support for the wrong reasons
- o Struggle to forge an identity: You can't be you

Results in Alienation from community, no communication with your community

3- Self-doubt about body image

- o Wanting to change something in your body
- o Struggle with weight-related to emotional baggage
- o Difficulty expressing positive feedback about your body

5- Not reacting to bad situations

- Harassment/body shaming/ bullying/ result in:
- o adapting (related to Conformism)
 - o sheltering of self and staying home
 - o avoiding people and mirrors
 - o no motivation to self-reflect (when negative comments bring on a feeling of failure)

2- Media Exposure and Media Communication

- o No representation or Identification
- o Only 1 standard of beauty
- o Communicating that you are failing your body
- o Living the Instagram life
- o Obligation to present your best self always (related to Conformism)

4- Negative reactions to situations

- o Resulting to violence
- o Obsessive management of weight loss
- o Loss of self-focus
- o Changing body image to please others and to fit in (related to Conformism)

6- Big changes - Bad Results

- Body perception struggles:
- o When changing communities
 - o When changing appearance (change wasn't planned)

7- Negative Communication

- Negative remarks and an abundance of criticism about your outer appearance:
 - o leave no space for growth (same as constant noise) (related to Self-doubt about body image)
- o become embedded in your brain and now regarded as the truth (related to Media exposure and Communication)
 - o lead to seeds of self-doubts inadvertently and sometimes indirectly planted by parents
- o stick and stay with you for a significant amount of time
 - o lead to diminishing self-esteem
- o lead to sheltering of yourself (related to Not reacting to bad situations)
 - o Judgment and shaming disguised as positive criticism and concern
- o lead to struggle with weight issues for years
 - o Discussion and criticism of other people's bodies is deemed acceptable
- o lead to trauma (brought on by a different culture than yours)
 - o Callousness, and a lack of tactfulness and humbleness from close family members leads to outright body shaming and anxiousness
- o lead to negative body perception (especially from close community members)
 - o Lack of appreciation for being yourself in your own community (related to Conformism)
- o lead to making you question your family's love for you
 - o Redirection of shame to the people shaming you
- o lead to hurt, especially from role models and loved ones

8- Community Pressures

- o Unattainable standards of beauty are upheld,
- o Constant need to live up to a beauty standard you don't believe in and if not followed
- o Constant need of improving your external self to keep up with demands of society
- o Adapting to the standard body of your community (related to Not reacting to bad situations)
- o No version of you is good enough
- o Need to wear makeup as a sign of respect and means of engaging of trust
- o Duty for women to get married and have kids leads to years of working on your external self almost exclusively
- o Pressures lead to adverse methods of losing weight and negative relationship with your own body and low self-esteem issues
- o Standing out is uncomfortable, blending in is desired (related to Conformism/Self-doubt about body image)
- o Even role models and loved ones change their appearance and stance when coming back to a closed community
- o Investing in your appearance is seen as having as much value as investing in your career or future

9- Extras

- o The idea of always looking good as a shield to cover up negative aspects of your life
- o Internalising social pressure to the point of unawareness of the reason behind struggles
- o Inhibition of self-discovery, self-love, and creativity in a closed community
- o Adapting communication to different societal expectations to fit in

The interview results showed some of the main struggles that these women dealt with.

The process of making this report was upsetting but the more times I heard and read the interviews the easier it got to take an objective look at the main clusters.

Because of the creative approach done in a design class and the use of self-reflection, I was able to begin a healthier relationship with my body and to address the topic of body perception through design.

This method of explicit reflection by writing and drawing became the tool used in this thesis to help women better understand the relationship they have with their bodies.

I wanted to provide a means for them to be able to answer questions about themselves and where they stand.

I wanted to help them get a better understanding of what they need to do to be more comfortable in their bodies.

STEP 3: DESIGN OF DIARY

After this in-depth analysis of the main themes taken from the interviews, a diary was designed for the women to use as a tool to communicate with their body, and to reflect on their relationship with it.

This diary was given to 7 out of 10 women due to various circumstances.

The diary follows the same principles of a design probe but does not aim for the same result.

As discussed by Mattelmäki (2008), a design probe is an assortment of tasks and projects designed and given to people to convey their opinions and emotions and to document their experiences.

It is essentially a personal testimony that is guided by devised tasks to find alternative modes of exploration to a problem. Probes do not solve problems but help guide the designer in the right direction, as they are subjective and have a lot of room for interpretation.

The most common application for a probe is a diary, which is what is used in this thesis. But unlike a typical design probe, where data is collected from the diary to be examined and discussed, this thesis utilizes the diary as the last means of exploration, and not only as an initial data collection. The diaries were used more for the personal growth of women than for research purposes.

There are several reasons for probing, one of them being data collection. Probes can also serve as inspiration for a project, or as a way to have users participate in the development of a design, and they can also be the means of interaction between designers and participants.

In this thesis, the probe does collect information, but the main objective of it is to help its user with their personal experience of their body perception.

It is both a design probe and a self-communication tool intended as an end product or a median for the users to begin their exploration of themselves.

The interviews served as a tool to collect meaningful information about the participants, but this experience was aimed to help these same people and facilitate their self-reflection.

In the interviews, the women were asked to look into themselves and reflect on their lives through their body perception. With the probes, they were guided and shown how to do it.

The aim of the diary is to allow these women to explore how they feel about themselves and for them to enjoy a little moment of reflection in their day, relax and put down their thoughts.

To take a moment for them, to remove everything else from their minds and contemplate on their body perception:
ME for ME.

Studying the interviews showed me which issues were most important and in what areas the women needed support. Accordingly, this diary is comprised of tasks and questions specifically tailored to address the issues previously analysed, based on what is common in their stories and on personal experience.

PROBE CONTENTS

Each probe kit contains a consent form, an information sheet about the project, a diary to fill, coloured pens and some stickers, for the women to be able to express themselves in different ways.

Everything is packaged in brown paper, sealed with a twine cord. Some dried lavender flowers are placed in a fold in the front, to make an aesthetically pleasing kit that the women will enjoy participating in and to offer a more personal touch to the kit and give it more value.

This attention to the appeal of the kits was inspired by Ahde-Deal (2013, pp. 47-50), who encourages designing probes in gentle ways that will make the participants feel well regarded when they are given the probes.



DIARY DETAILS

The size of the diary is a A5 notebook so that it can be carried anywhere and be held more intimately. The diary is made of 20 numbered white pages with very little writing on them.

The pages are minimalistic to keep the focus on the tasks at hand and not to overcrowd or distract the participant from the purpose of the diary. This also allows as much room for the user to elaborate as possible. The blank spaces are there for the participants to write freely, as much or as little as they want, and to have the liberty to draw, add stickers, or make mistakes.

There are small illustrations on most pages that represent me to keep a link going between the participant and myself, so they would feel accompanied throughout the book.

The illustrations are meant to be fun, quirky and accessible. The way they are drawn is to put some levity into the hard questions and attenuate the heavy tasks.

The colours used in the illustrations are also indicative of the mood of each task, some use more joyful colours, like orange, to accentuate the challenge ahead. Others use darker colours like purple or grey to embody the heaviness of the questions asked.

The only colours used in the whole diary are those of the illustrations and the inside of the cover page, which is a bright orange, representing enthusiasm and encouragement.

The diary addresses the reader directly, to immediately capture the attention and make it more personal. It is in some ways very focused and directs the reader precisely on the task at hand, but the questions themselves are as open as possible and do not try to lead the reader too much, so that the answers are genuine and creative.

The diary sometimes includes examples to encourage the reader to stay excited and to help them progress through the tasks and not freeze on one task or ignore it (To see diary content, view appendix B).

DIARY CONTENTS

As mentioned previously, each task and question created is based on the main clusters analysed in the report of the interviews. To discuss the tasks in order, the cover page will be skipped for now and explained later.

Page 2: The introduction page is to explain what this diary is for and how to navigate the book. It is required from the participants to write the date of when they perform each task, to keep a time frame of their progress.

Page 3: *Table of content*

The book is purposefully designed in such a way that it could be filled freely, so the table of contents shows how much time every exercise will take and what the user can expect from each task. The free flow of the diary was done to allow the participants freedom of navigation. Because the tasks vary in length, they can choose the page that fits best to their day. Some of the exercises require several days of reflection which is why the diary keepers need to know when to do tasks that need more time. The exercises not only vary in the amount of time but also in 'difficulty'. The participant can choose to do only the relatively easy and fun tasks, or they can tackle the ones that require more thought and where they have to pause to reflect.

Page 4: *Draw boobs*

This exercise is an icebreaker and allows women to start with a playful look at bodies in general, and with breasts in particular.

Page 5: *How will I be with my body today?*

This task is used to address the issue of self-doubt previously collected in the report and allow women to express positive feedback about their bodies.

Page 6: *To prepare to communicate with others*

These questions relate to the community pressures experienced by the participants as well as the negative communications they are exposed to. They aim to mentally prepare the women for another eventual exposure.

Pages 7- 8: *Gratitude list*

The goal of keeping a gratitude list is to remember and keep in mind a beneficial experience or moment and to appreciate the positive emotions that arise from it. When the diary keepers turn the page, they realize that this list also helps them focus on the positive aspects that their body gives them.

Pages 10-11: *Anger page*

This page is the halfway point in the diary and is meant to be torn or destroyed. It is to show that it's okay to have negative thoughts sometimes about your body and that there is always a balance to achieve, for you to have a healthy and authentic outlook of your body.

Page 13: *Negative situation*

This page also addresses negative communication, but this time through someone else. It also focuses on how to react in a bad situation. It validates the fact that people should take on the attitude of lifting someone instead of lowering themselves.

Page 14: *Challenge yourself*

This task intends to demonstrate that it is okay to stand out and be different from the crowd, an issue reported in Conformism.

Page 15: *Actively delete some negativity*

This exercise is designed to address the issue of social media exposure. Since people are constantly on their phones and

in the virtual world, they are subjected to images and posts about other people living their best lives, and that can lead to self-deprecation, low confidence, and in a very real sense, an internalization of these socially constructed pressures to the point of unawareness of the reason behind these struggles.

Page 16: *Coping with yourself*

The previous issue can lead to the need of answering this question, which falls under the report category: not reacting to bad situations. It is good for the participant to assess if the way they deal with a struggle concerning their body is constructive or needs improvement. This can lead to a better understanding of their coping mechanisms and provide some reflection on their true selves, when they are most vulnerable.

Page 17: *Cure of social media*

This is the second task that tackles social media exposure and tries to give the participants a chance to realize how much time they spend browsing online and helps them keep themselves in check.

Page 18 and cover page: *Draw yourself*

The last exercise brings the user back to the cover page. This page has a lightly drawn outline of a person with their hands and a leg up as if in celebration. The person is drawn in movement to allow people to insert themselves more easily without focusing on the shape of each body part.

Here they can let go and enjoy the process of colouring a sketch of themselves. This was strategically placed as the cover page to frame the whole diary positively.

Page 19: The last page is reserved for extra notes or comments.

RESULTS

The diary was given in-person to each woman for around 3 to 4 weeks. After the women finished filling up the diaries, they were taken back in person.

The interpretation of the diaries was done in a systematic way, where each task was analysed for each woman and then an overall assessment was deduced.

But first some general valuations were determined:

- o The participants answered on average 10 out of 11 tasks.
- o 5 out of 7 women performed the tasks randomly and did not follow the order of the booklet
- o 6 out of 7 women used the stickers provided and all of them worked with the coloured pens.
- o All of the women took over the feel of the diary and made it their own. They filled the empty spaces and wrote in big letters, added stickers, sketches and pictures to their booklets.

Page 4: *Draw boobs*

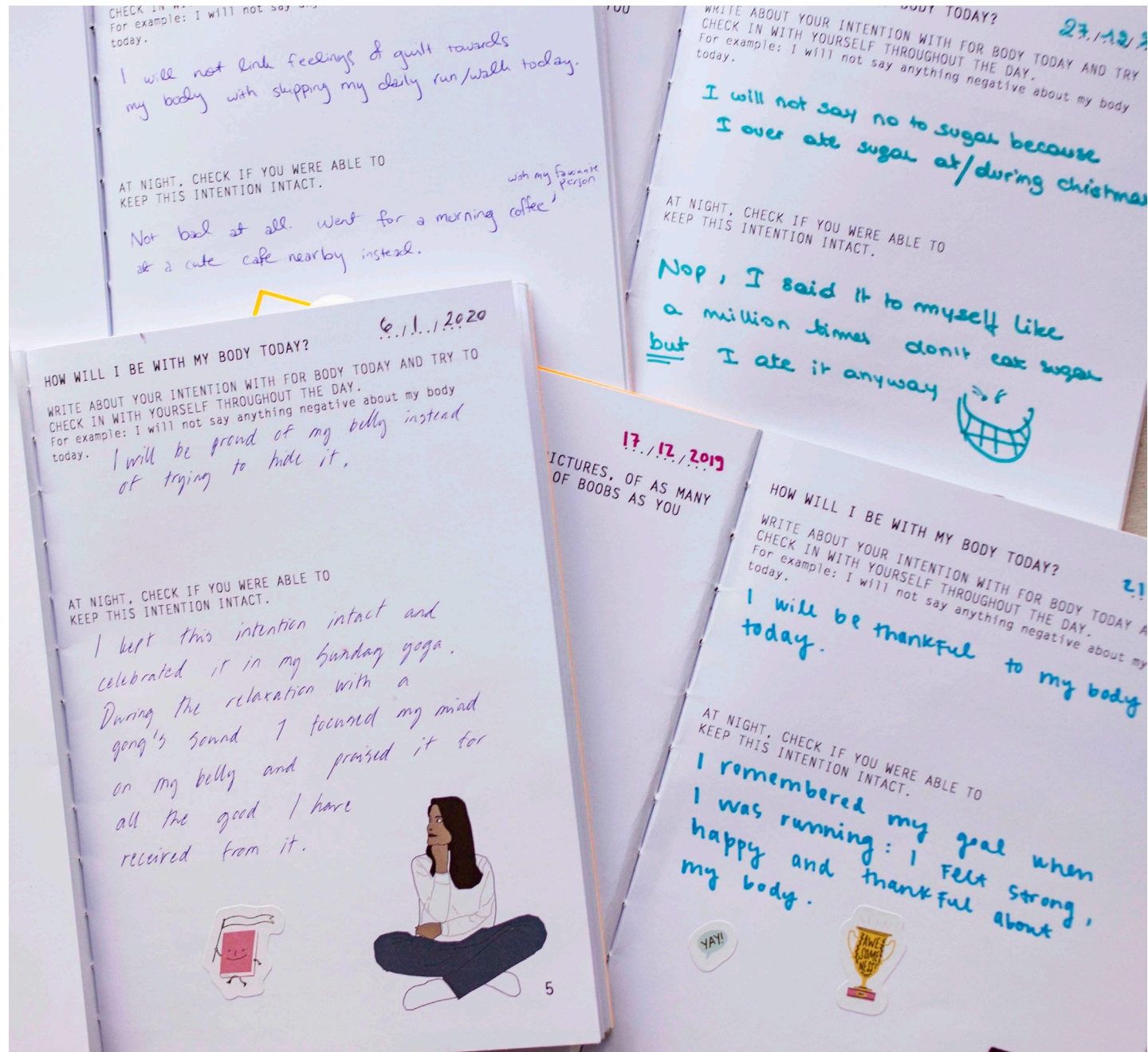
Some of the women had fun with that page, and one of them even wrote descriptions for each type she drew.

Others were more hesitant and only drew about two to three types. One person remarked that it is a fun way to start being more accepting of your body.

Two women mentioned that it was more challenging than they realized and quite interesting.

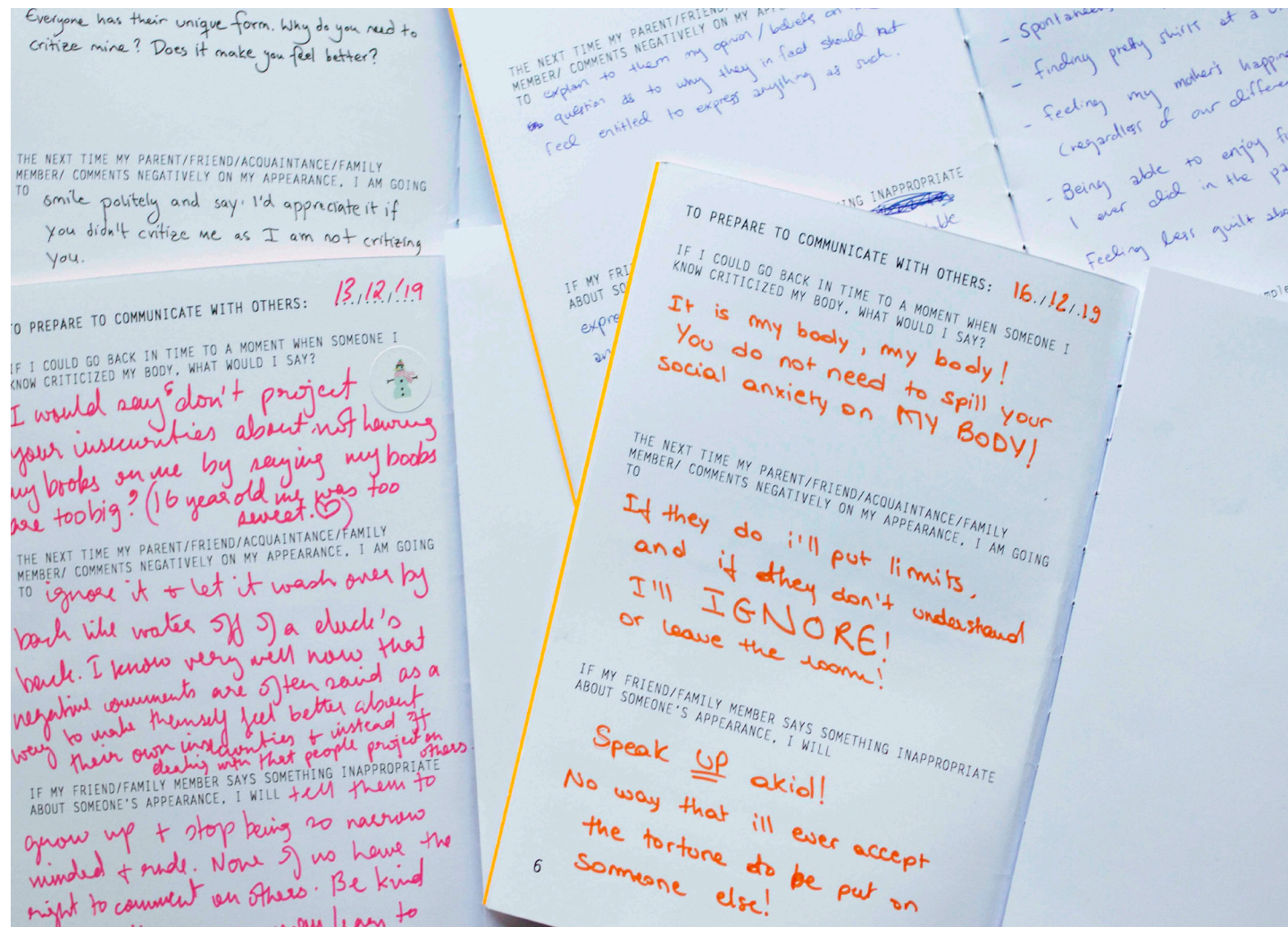


All the participants had positive goals they wanted to achieve and they were able to check in with themselves and elaborate on how they kept their intentions alive during the day.



Most of the women were very vocal and direct with the way they would respond to the situations presented to them, some of them recalled moments of their teenage years when such situations were taking place, three of them used questions to directly address their dialoguer and one of them reflected on the fact that she no longer has to deal with these negative comments as she has removed toxic people from her life.

One person used body descriptors as well as words to show what she would do in those situations.

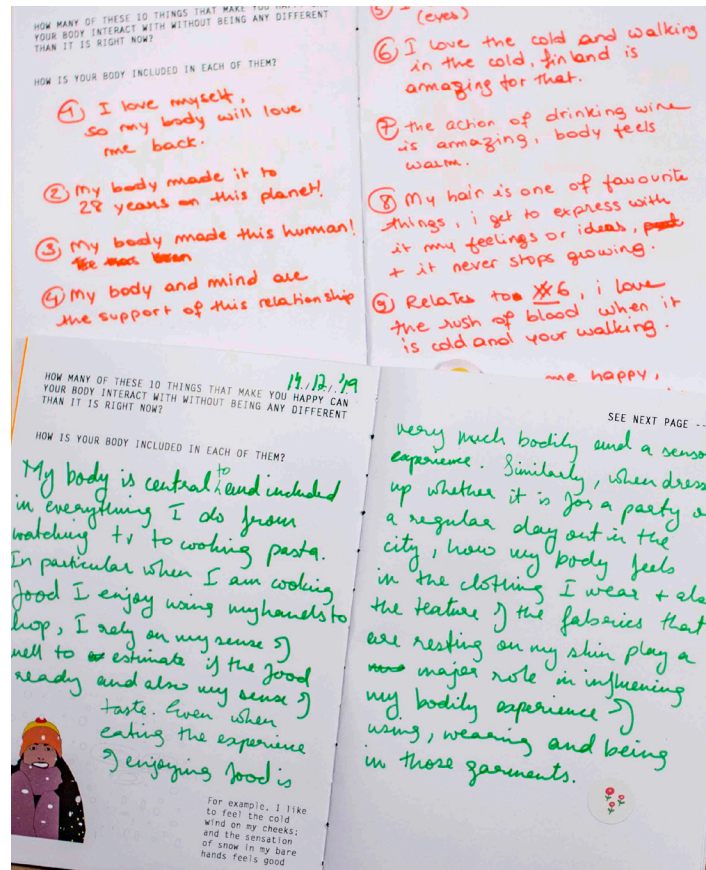


Overall very positive outcomes from all of the women.

Some of them wrote lists and added stickers, others used sketches and one of them even cut pictures out of magazines and glued her own personal pictures to the book.

Most of the participants were very elaborate and reflective of how the things that make them happy are connected to their bodies.

Among other things, they discussed their relationship with weight, food, and sensory aspects of their bodies using descriptive terms with some detail.

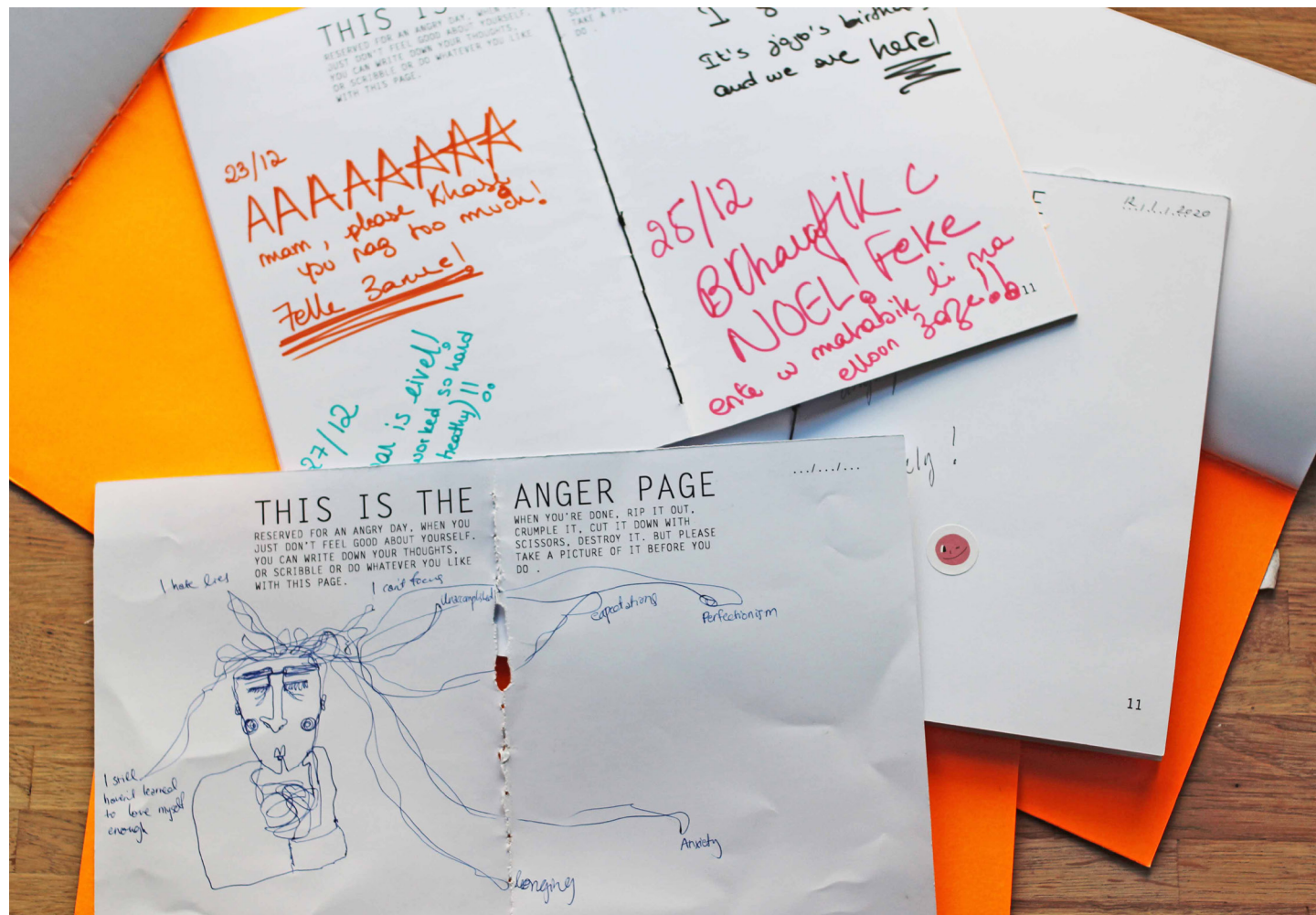


Page 10-11: Anger page

Some of the women ripped the pages out and crumpled them, others wrote on the pages on several occasions as a way to release their anger and put their emotions on paper.

Three of them did not use that page at all.

One of the women opted for a drawing instead, with some words written around it.

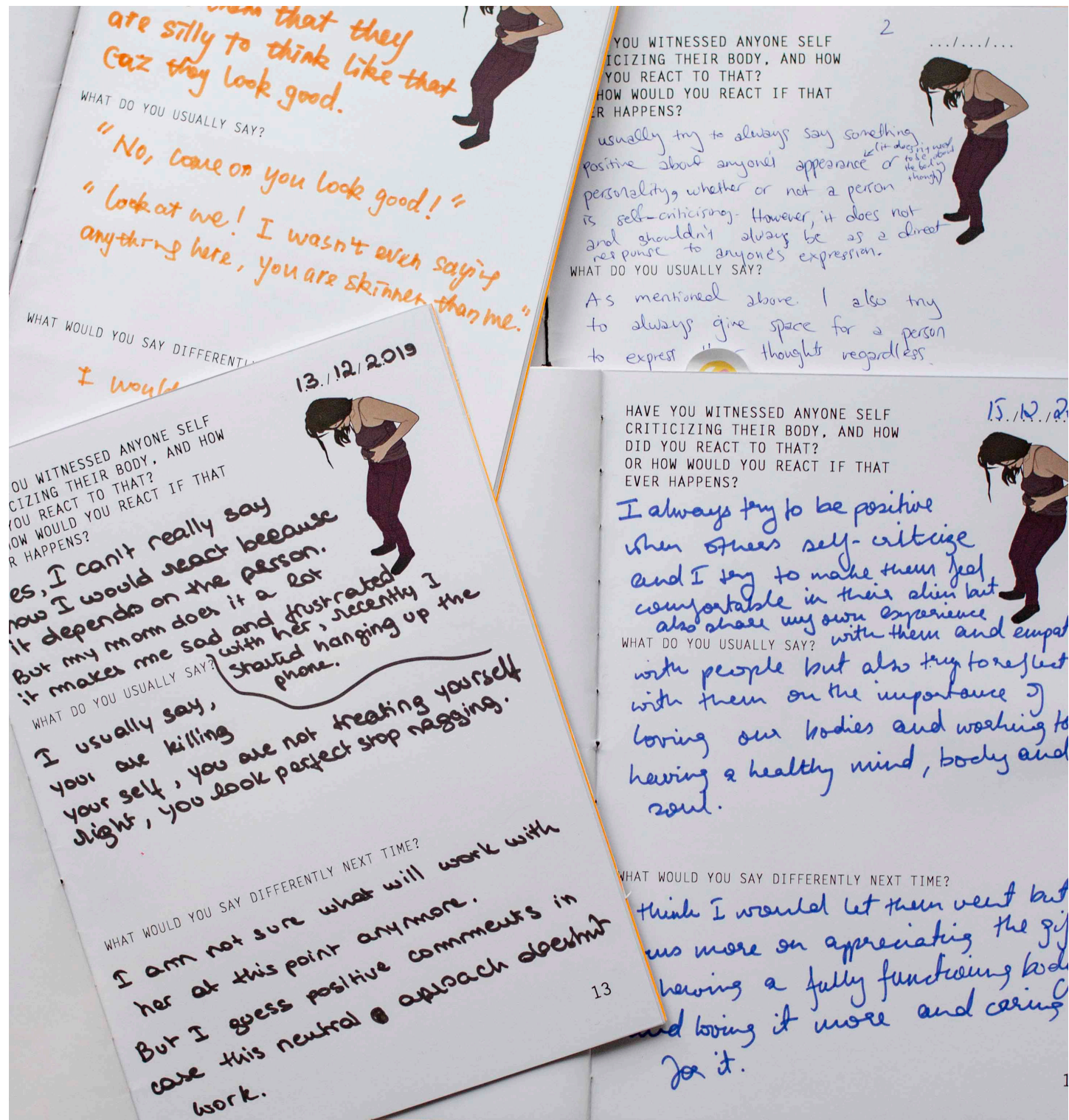


The participants all tried to keep the focus on the positive, and not feed this kind of negative talk.

One of them went deep into reflection on the appreciation a healthy body deserves.

Most of them focused their thoughts on one person in particular, reflected on previous conversations and tried to come up with a new way of approaching the topic.

They also directly addressed someone and used advice that was given to them before.

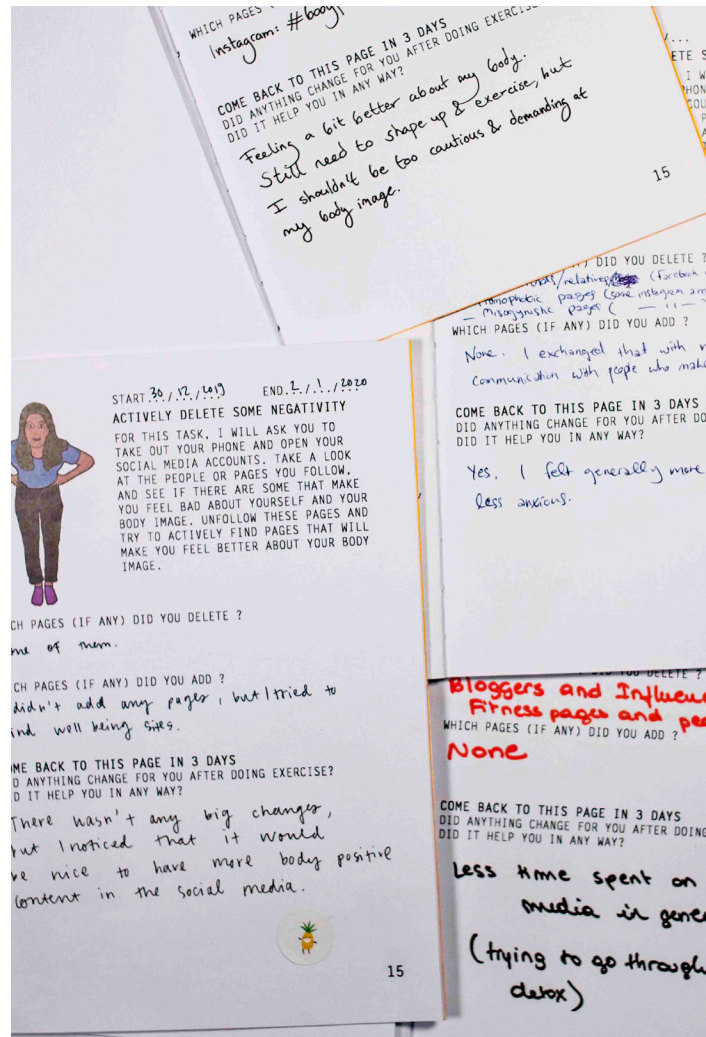




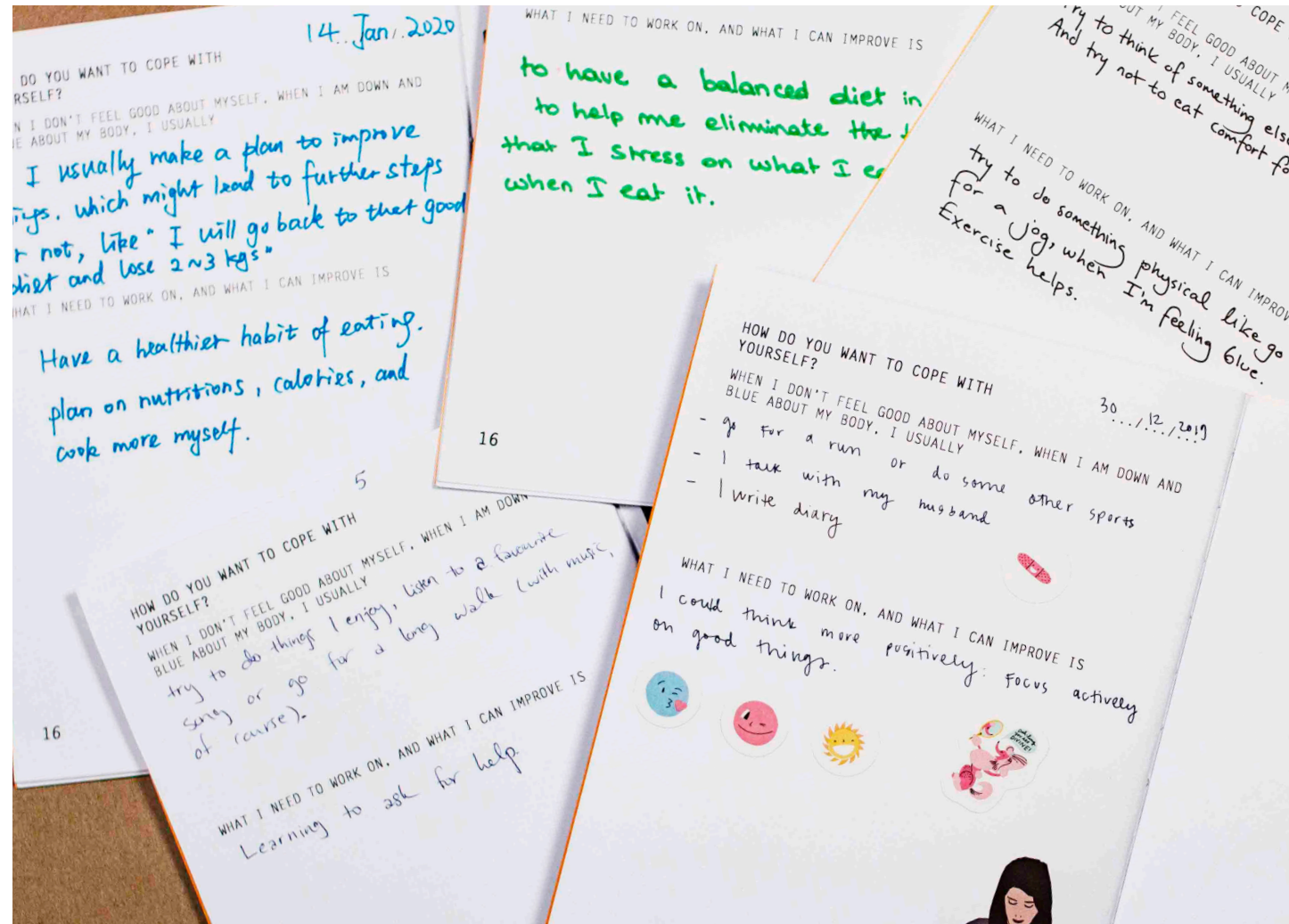
Two women did not delete any social media pages but noticed the need to add some positive pages to their account.

Some women deleted several pages that were toxic to them and instead of adding new ones, they focused on spending less time online.

The result had a positive impact on their mind and bodies. Overall, the women who did the exercise benefited from it in different ways.

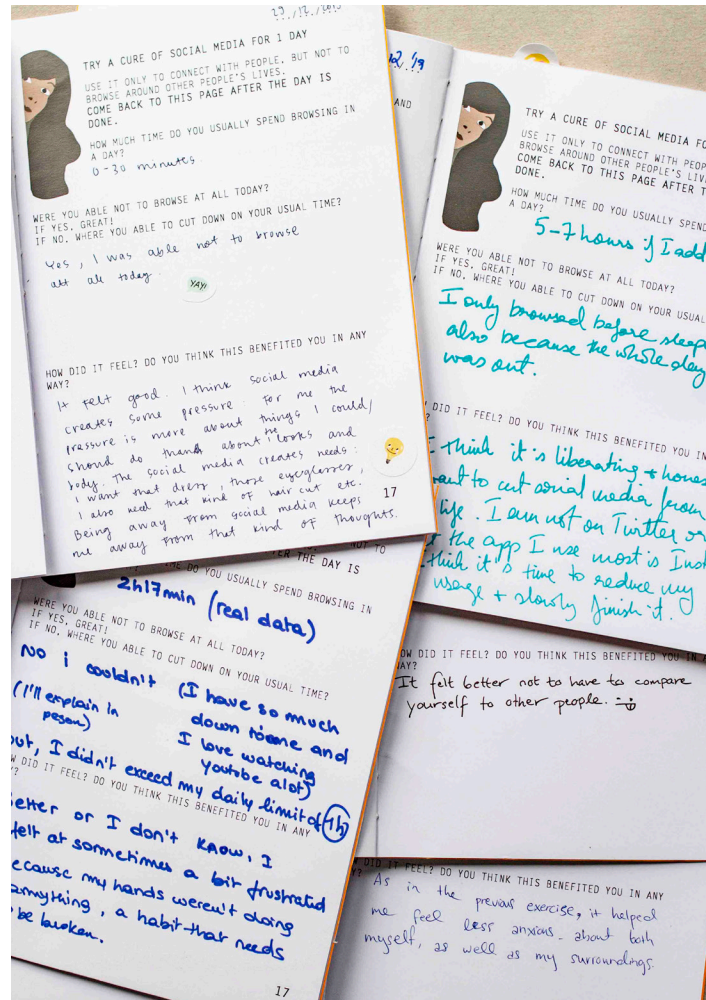


In these questions, the women learned from themselves and made plans to better deal with anxiety and improve the way they react to struggles.



The total average time the participants spent online was about two hours.

Most of them were able to cut back on their time and even though some of them found it frustrating, a lot of them felt a sense of liberation, reduced anxiety and pressures.



Five out of seven women completed the cover page.

Out of the two that did not, one of them forgot to do it and the other one did not want to.

It is clear that the women who drew themselves put some thought into it and made the cover page shine, with stickers and different colours.



One woman wrote about her new and positive perspective regarding her body image and reflected on how this should be integrated into society.

Another one noted that there should also be a page about being accessible and approachable.

A third one commented on the fact that this process was a truly nice way to think about her body image.



FEEDBACK

In the consent forms given to the women, there was an option for a group discussion after finishing the diary, but most participants chose to give their feedback one on one.

As such, the feedback was discussed in person for some of them and by phone calls for others.

Here are the main questions asked and the responses:

- o What is your overall feeling after finishing the diary?
- o Was the diary a positive experience in your life? / Did you get anything out of it?
- o Did this diary make you reflect on your body perception?
- o Would you give this diary to anyone? Would you recommend it to other people?
- o Did you find any negative aspect to it?
- o What did you think of the illustrations?
- o What was the best page for you?
- o What was the most challenging page?



All of the women responded that the diary was a positive experience for them, and that it made them more conscious of their body in an encouraging way.

Some women said that it required a lot of focus and contemplation and that the tasks were demanding. However, it did make them reflect on the connection they have with their body and check-in with themselves in ways they hadn't done before.

For one person, the diary raised questions to issues they don't usually think about, which changed their attitude towards them.

All of the women said that they would recommend the diary to someone else and that many of their friends would enjoy the experience.

One of the women said she would give the diary to her husband as she feels he can benefit from reflecting on his body image.

Another woman mentioned that this was a safe approach to the topic of body image, especially for someone who hadn't processed that subject before, and if they didn't have access to therapy or somebody to talk to, that this diary is created in a way that anyone can answer regardless of their background, age, gender or body type.

This diary was seen by many as a good starting point in the journey of a woman and her body image and can serve as an introduction on how to communicate with your body.

Several women noted that this diary could also be distributed to younger people, who are more impressionable, because it makes them aware of their power as human beings and helps them in learning how to fit in their skin.



Another person commented on the need for this diary to be given to everyone as it is essential in developing the habit of being more conscious about your body and increasing your self-awareness.

The illustrations were met with positive comments: they were helpful, very expressive and fun.

The participants were happy that they were included as they were considered straight forward and made it easier to understand what each topic was about as well as help in the reflection process.

Other comments given were:

They were nicely done, so it made the process of writing next to them more enjoyable.

They were right with the flow and more of them could have been added.

They made the diary more personal.

They are not trying to be one body type and they are aesthetically pleasing. They were impressive.

Two women found the list of things that make you happy as their best task, the one they enjoyed doing the most.

Two women loved the cover page and dived into the exercise because they wanted it to be beautiful; they found the outline and position of the drawing convenient and they felt the movement coming from it.

Three women talked about the importance of the communication pages; they found them very helpful and felt that writing down these thoughts was necessary and good for them.



There was not a specific page that was challenging for any of the women.

Some further details they discussed:

The tasks that required more time were easily incorporated into their everyday life.

The number of tasks was adequate, and the overall time given to finish the diary was good.

It was convenient to be able to jump from one page to the other and not do them in order as you could fill in the page that suited you according to how much free time you had.

In general, they found the tasks written in a friendly way and did not put too much pressure on the diary keeper.

The outfit and design of the diary was well thought of and beautifully done.

One person ended the conversation by saying that our body perception should come from within and not be affected by the outside world, and this diary helps in going in that direction.

Another woman stated that this diary made her reflect on a lot of things, she discovered how much she is influenced by the social media accounts she follows, and it made her reflect on her shopping habits.

One of the women observed that this diary made her revisit a subject that she had put aside for a long time, and that it was a gentle reminder to begin the process of reflecting on her body perception.

A few participants said that they felt freer after completing the whole booklet.



DISCUSSIONS AND CONCLUSION

SUMMARY OF THE FINDINGS

Because of the positive changes with my body perception, I wanted to help women be more comfortable in their bodies. And because self-reflection and exploration helped me achieve this, I wanted to introduce the same methods to other women.

The diary project is a first attempt to tackle the issue of negative body perception through design practices and self-communication.

It is by no means an end project and acts only as a step in the right direction. This project shows that design can become a tool for tackling such personal issues that are rooted in societal pressures.

o The interview process and diary experiment validated previously discussed notions: Negative body pressures are felt throughout a variety of socio-economic backgrounds and target women regardless of their culture and upbringing. Even if the external pressures differ, from tight communities to social media influences, they result in internal pressures leading to negative body perceptions and an unnecessary focus on the body.

o The interview process was very important to establish a connection with the women, understand the body pressures that they live with and realise the need for a self-communication tool.

o Tackling this social issue from a design perspective was beneficial to the creation of a diary that encompassed the issues discussed by the women during their interviews. The designer here acted as a facilitator of self-awareness and helped women reflect on their body perception.

o After the diary was filled, I presented the possibility of conducting a group discussion between the women, but most of them chose to give their feedback one on one. Because the diary explored a very personal topic, workshops or group studies might not be the best way to conduct such projects. The diary was intimate and at the same time protected, so that it was alright to be shared with me. However, a group discussion could have been beneficial for the women who wanted to meet each other, and it could have led to a sort of support group of shared experiences and pressures.

The findings thus show that a carefully designed diary can become a powerful tool to facilitate a positive self-communication.



REFLECTION

This project came from a personal place of struggle and a need to create something that would have been useful to my younger self and her journey to body acceptance and self-awareness.

The design of the diary was the most important part of the thesis, as each task had to provide an answer to an issue and had to be relevant to the women I interviewed, without alienating some of them. The questions had to be light and easy enough to answer while touching upon deep and serious subjects.

It was positively received by the women involved, and it was a real pleasure to see that this diary opened up a conversation with their bodies and helped them reflect on their body perception. It would be safe to presume that the diary reached fruitful results and was a successful experiment.

In accordance with the comments provided by the participants, this diary is a starting point for someone to get to know themselves and recognize where they stand and what work needs to be done. It focuses on how a person can react positively to their environment and concentrate on growing their body acceptance.

This project was greatly beneficial for me, merely by talking to this group of women. They raised a lot of questions and helped start a conversation about body pressures. They were the push needed to induce a creative process and opened my eyes to the countless pressures endured by women all over the world.

From the feedback received by the women, and from self-reflection, this project can be of help to younger people who are beginning to attempt to understand their bodies and where their pressures come from.

This diary experiment can also aid people who want to be in touch with their bodies, renew their relationship with it, or start a better one; just like it happened to one of the participants.

A lot of time was spent creating the diary and personalising it to the women I interviewed, but I believe other people might also benefit from this and find the support they need.

This diary is a safe and relaxed way to venture down the road of self-discovery and acceptance.

LIMITATIONS AND POSSIBLE IMPROVEMENTS

Future improvements can be made to this project in various sectors:

The survey was only a jump start to the development of the thesis idea, but it could be further developed and include more questions regarding body image and possibly be conducted online to reach more people.

The diary project could continue and be improved by including a bigger number of women and from more varied backgrounds.

The issue of body dissatisfaction can also be studied within social identities, special populations and minority groups. People in different classes, races, geographic locations and body types experience entirely different levels of pressure.

This project should further attempt to address members of society who are more vulnerable to negative body pressures and discrimination, such as the LGBTQ+ community, racial minorities, people with physical disabilities and visible differences, among others.

For a future study, the analysis of the diary suggests that more questions and tasks could be added, and the diary could stay with the women for much longer.

The probe kit could also include another object for the women to carry with them and remind them of instances of personal pressures.

In broader terms, the thesis only addresses what women can do for themselves, self-reflect.

Even though external pressures are known to be a big contributor to negative body perception, the thesis does not address what others can do for women and how most problems are rooted in society.

Although designing tools can start building a strong foundation with the self, overcoming these problems requires socio-political actions.

Although the project focuses on critical communication on a personal level, it also highlights the need of developing a society-level sense to remove the pressures of stereotyping.

As citizens, it is our responsibility to ask for better policy making, and directly speak up against these negative social and cultural influences. Whether it is as small as addressing social media influencers who are promoting negative body pressures or as significant as boycotting industries who abuse women's rights.

This social issue could be tackled by different design practices, possibly addressing a wider audience to continue the conversation of women's body perception issues:

- o The creation of a campaign for women for example in my country, with the design of posters and billboards that promote positive body image

- o Design of a tool for women to be able to count how many times they have been catcalled and sexually harassed while walking on the streets and have a way of displaying this on the street

- o Design of a critical art piece or video revealing the toxic beauty culture that remains present in some countries such as Lebanon

These suggestions follow a more activist approach to design, but I believe that even participating in a mundane project such as the diary can trigger personal experiences that connect people and aid in building a community.

It is about connecting practices and creating solidarity among people who need this type of support.

This diary could become a downloadable tool for people to print and work on, which would reach a bigger audience and help anyone who needs to reflect on their body image.

Another way to reach more people is to collaborate within different design fields and create an interactive website or application that people can access every day and visualize their progress or be in contact with more people that feel the same way.

Most if not all people have felt pressures regarding their bodies, and it could be useful to have a platform for them to note or express their issues in a safe and tolerant environment.

BEYOND THE BODY

This attempt at making a small social impact needed to start from somewhere, and it began with the body.

But this discussion can be applied to other behaviours that we encounter and put into action every day.

After building a dialogue with the self, raising a positive perception of the body and understanding the body in their own terms, it is important to recognize that to feel significant or valued, people should not have to keep the focus on their body or their beauty.

This process will lead to different roads because it is singular for each woman. For example, some women will use the power of choice and agency over their bodies to have a better understanding of their identity while others will try to let go of consumerist activities and work on building their self-perception through new mediums of expression.

Since design practice embeds the potential of raising critical questions through creative mediums, which can be relatable for many people, it can significantly contribute to such change.



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APPENDIX

APPENDIX A

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS:

General questions:

-Name, age, what do you do, what is your family situation (siblings, parents), where are you from, where did you grow up, where did you go to school...

Everyday life:

-Do you like shopping for clothes? Why?

-How long did it take you to prepare yourself this morning? why?

-Take me through your routine in the morning

-Do you have any tattoos? Why? Do you have any piercings? When did you get them? Why?

-What kind of physical activity do you do? Why do you do it? How do you feel when you do it?

Societal pressures:

-When you were growing up, do you remember having any parts of your body you were self-conscious about?

-how would you describe your relationship with your body growing up?

-Did you feel any pressures growing up to look a certain way, or to dress a certain way, from your friends and family?

-Are you still happy with the way you look?

Cultural pressures:

-Did you read fashion magazines/tabloids/did you watch teenage movies, or did you pay attention to ads growing up? what did you think of them? why? What do you think they provided for you?

-do you still watch these things? why? what do they provide you now?

-Do you think they have had any influence on your style or behavior?

-What kind of accounts do you follow on social media? And why?

-Is it common for women to have plastic surgery in your country? What are your thoughts on the subject?

Deeper questions:

-Have you ever felt really out of place? Or gotten judgmental looks from anyone for the way you dressed or behaved? How did that make you feel?

-Do you have a memory of a time when you had to change your behavior because of someone else?

-Could you say a few words about your body? What do you think of it?

APPENDIX B

HEY!

MY NAME IS HALA AND I WILL BE YOUR GUIDE FOR THIS DIARY.

I AM INTERESTED IN GETTING A BETTER UNDERSTANDING OF YOUR SELF-COMMUNICATION. I WILL BE WITH YOU EVERY STEP OF THE WAY, I HOPE YOU ENJOY THIS THOUGHT JOURNEY AND THAT IT HELPS YOU ACKNOWLEDGE YOUR BODY IN A POSITIVE AND CLEAR WAY.

THE TASKS THAT I WILL BE ASKING OF YOU CAN BE DAUNTING AND THE ACT OF ACKNOWLEDGING YOURSELF CAN BE SCARY, SO PLEASE REMEMBER TO HAVE FUN AND ANSWER AS TRUTHFULLY AS YOU WOULD ANSWER YOUR OWN SELF. YOU CAN ALSO SKIP THE QUESTIONS THAT DO NOT APPLY TO YOU.

HOW TO NAVIGATE THIS NOTEBOOK:

YOU DO NOT NEED TO FOLLOW A SPECIFIC ORDER, BUT MAKE SURE THAT YOU **WRITE THE DATE** IN WHICH YOU DID EACH PAGE.

I WOULD SUGGEST YOU START WITH THE FIRST TASK AND END WITH THE LAST ONE, BUT IT IS COMPLETELY UP TO YOU!

YOU SHOULD BROWSE THE WHOLE BOOK FIRST BEFORE YOU CHOOSE WHICH TASK TO START WITH.

PLEASE WRITE YOUR NAME AT THE BACK COVER OF THE BOOK.

2



HERE IS THE TABLE OF CONTENT, CHOOSE THE PAGE THAT SUITS YOU EACH TIME, FOR WHEN YOU:

WANT TO DOODLE	PAGE 4	10min
WANT TO START YOUR DAY WITH INTENTION	PAGE 5	24h
ARE PREPARING TO COMMUNICATE WITH OTHERS ..	PAGE 6	20min
NEED A POSITIVE REMINDER	PAGES 7-8	20min
NEED TO LET OFF SOME STEAM	PAGES 9-12	15min
WANT TO KNOW WHAT TO SAY	PAGE 13	20min
ARE UP FOR A CHALLENGE.....	PAGE 14	24h
WANT TO DELETE SOME NEGATIVITY.....	PAGE 15	3days
ARE TRYING TO COPE.....	PAGE 16	15min
NEED A GOOD BREAK.....	PAGE 17	24h
WANT TO DRAW YOURSELF	PAGE 18	1h
NEED SOME EXTRA SPACE FOR NOTES.....	PAGE 19	

3

TO PREPARE TO COMMUNICATE WITH OTHERS: .../.../...

IF I COULD GO BACK IN TIME TO A MOMENT WHEN SOMEONE I KNOW CRITICIZED MY BODY, WHAT WOULD I SAY?

LIST, DRAW, OR GLUE PICTURES OF 10 THINGS THAT MAKE YOU HAPPY RIGHT NOW .../.../...

THE NEXT TIME MY PARENT/FRIEND/ACQUAINTANCE/FAMILY MEMBER/ COMMENTS NEGATIVELY ON MY APPEARANCE, I AM GOING TO

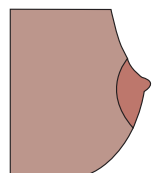
IF MY FRIEND/FAMILY MEMBER SAYS SOMETHING INAPPROPRIATE ABOUT SOMEONE'S APPEARANCE, I WILL

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For example, snow makes me happy



7



DRAW, OR GLUE PICTURES, OF AS MANY DIFFERENT KINDS OF BOOBS AS YOU WANT

HOW WILL I BE WITH MY BODY TODAY? .../.../...

WRITE ABOUT YOUR INTENTION WITH FOR BODY TODAY AND TRY TO CHECK IN WITH YOURSELF THROUGHOUT THE DAY.
For example: I will not say anything negative about my body today.

AT NIGHT, CHECK IF YOU WERE ABLE TO KEEP THIS INTENTION INTACT.



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HOW MANY OF THESE 10 THINGS THAT MAKE YOU HAPPY CAN YOUR BODY INTERACT WITH WITHOUT BEING ANY DIFFERENT THAN IT IS RIGHT NOW?

HOW IS YOUR BODY INCLUDED IN EACH OF THEM?



For example, I like to feel the cold wind on my cheeks; and the sensation of snow in my bare hands feels good

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SEE NEXT PAGE -->

THIS IS THE ANGER PAGE

RESERVED FOR AN ANGRY DAY. WHEN YOU JUST DON'T FEEL GOOD ABOUT YOURSELF. YOU CAN WRITE DOWN YOUR THOUGHTS, OR SCRIBBLE OR DO WHATEVER YOU LIKE WITH THIS PAGE.

WHEN YOU'RE DONE, RIP IT OUT, CRUMPLE IT, CUT IT DOWN WITH SCISSORS, DESTROY IT. BUT PLEASE TAKE A PICTURE OF IT BEFORE YOU DO .

.../.../...

<-- SEE PREVIOUS PAGE

HAVE YOU WITNESSED ANYONE SELF CRITICIZING THEIR BODY, AND HOW DID YOU REACT TO THAT? OR HOW WOULD YOU REACT IF THAT EVER HAPPENS?

.../.../...



WHAT DO YOU USUALLY SAY?

WHAT WOULD YOU SAY DIFFERENTLY NEXT TIME?

CHALLENGE YOURSELF TODAY

THIS IS A PHYSICAL TASK, RESERVE IT FOR A DAY WHEN YOU ARE LEAVING YOUR HOME. ON PURPOSE, DRESS DIFFERENTLY THAN YOU NORMALLY WOULD, SOMETHING EVEN AS SMALL AS WEARING DIFFERENT COLOURED SOCKS. REMEMBER THAT YOU CAN ALWAYS BLAME IT ON ME IF SOMEONE ASKS QUESTIONS!



WRITE DOWN OR DRAW WHAT YOU DID DIFFERENTLY.



START.../.../... END.../.../...
ACTIVELY DELETE SOME NEGATIVITY
FOR THIS TASK, I WILL ASK YOU TO TAKE OUT YOUR PHONE AND OPEN YOUR SOCIAL MEDIA ACCOUNTS. TAKE A LOOK AT THE PEOPLE OR PAGES YOU FOLLOW, AND SEE IF THERE ARE SOME THAT MAKE YOU FEEL BAD ABOUT YOURSELF AND YOUR BODY IMAGE. UNFOLLOW THESE PAGES AND TRY TO ACTIVELY FIND PAGES THAT WILL MAKE YOU FEEL BETTER ABOUT YOUR BODY IMAGE.

WHICH PAGES (IF ANY) DID YOU DELETE ?

WHICH PAGES (IF ANY) DID YOU ADD ?

COME BACK TO THIS AT THE END OF THE DAY:
LET ME KNOW IF THERE IS SOMETHING SPECIFIC THAT HAPPENED THAT YOU REMEMBER AND TELL ME ABOUT YOUR EXPERIENCE OF THIS DAY.

COME BACK TO THIS PAGE IN 3 DAYS
DID ANYTHING CHANGE FOR YOU AFTER DOING EXERCISE?
DID IT HELP YOU IN ANY WAY?

HOW DO YOU WANT TO COPE WITH YOURSELF?

WHEN I DON'T FEEL GOOD ABOUT MYSELF, WHEN I AM DOWN AND BLUE ABOUT MY BODY, I USUALLY

.../.../...

WHAT I NEED TO WORK ON, AND WHAT I CAN IMPROVE IS



TRY A CURE OF SOCIAL MEDIA FOR 1 DAY

USE IT ONLY TO CONNECT WITH PEOPLE, BUT NOT TO BROWSE AROUND OTHER PEOPLE'S LIVES.
COME BACK TO THIS PAGE AFTER THE DAY IS DONE.

HOW MUCH TIME DO YOU USUALLY SPEND BROWSING IN A DAY?

WERE YOU ABLE NOT TO BROWSE AT ALL TODAY?
IF YES, GREAT!
IF NO, WHERE YOU ABLE TO CUT DOWN ON YOUR USUAL TIME?

HOW DID IT FEEL? DO YOU THINK THIS BENEFITED YOU IN ANY WAY?



DRAW YOURSELF

.../.../...

IF YOU GO BACK TO THE COVER PAGE, YOU WILL SEE AN OUTLINE OF A PERSON JUMPING WITH ENTHUSIASM.

THIS PERSON REPRESENTS YOU AT YOUR HAPPIEST AND MOST EXCITED.

THIS IS NOW YOUR BODY, SO:
MAKE THIS OUTLINE LOOK LIKE YOU
ADD YOUR HAIR, FAVOURITE CLOTHES, OR NO CLOTHES AT ALL, FACIAL FEATURES...

AFTER YOU HAVE CUSTOMIZED YOUR BODY, COLOUR IN:
THE PARTS YOU LIKE
THE PARTS YOU ARE OKAY WITH
THE ONES YOU CAN'T IMAGINE CHANGING.

IT IS ALL YOU.

USING WHAT YOU HAVE AT YOUR DISPOSAL, ADD COLOURS AND STICKERS AND MAKE THIS THE HAPPIEST PAGE POSSIBLE.

WHEN YOU ARE SATISFIED WITH YOUR WORK, TAKE A MOMENT TO LOOK AT YOUR DRAWING AND TAKE IN ALL OF YOUR BODY.

REMEMBER THIS DRAWING AND THE PARTS OF YOURSELF YOU LIKE THE NEXT TIME YOU ARE FEELING NEGATIVE ABOUT YOUR BODY IMAGE.

HURRAY!
YOU ARE DONE!

WRITE OR DRAW ANHYTHING YOU WANT TO ADD

